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THE RESURRECTION OF THE HOUSE CHURCH:  
"WORSHIP AND WITNESS IN THE PRIMITIVE  
AND MODERN HOUSE CHURCH

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the School of Theology  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Religion

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by  
L. Jim Anthis  
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*This dissertation, written by*

L. JIM ANTHIS

*under the direction of his Faculty Committee,  
and approved by its members, has been presented  
to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of  
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requirements for the degree of*

**DOCTOR OF RELIGION**

*Faculty Committee*

*Harvey Auer*

*Eric L. Titus*

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\_\_\_\_\_

*Date*

*Apr. 22, 1970*

*J. C. Hough*

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## INTRODUCTION

During the past twenty years there has been a deep undercurrent in the church indicating that something is wrong. During the fifties, ferment was just beginning. To most observers the church appeared to be extremely successful as more and more people flocked in, more money was given, and new church buildings mushroomed. The church business was booming!

By the sixties, prophetic voices were beginning to be heard by more and more people. A shift was taking place in the local congregations. New members and attendance had reached their peak, and in some areas they were dropping. Consequently, people began to listen to the prophets, and church renewal was no longer a passing fancy; it was becoming a deep reality within the life of the church.

Various approaches to bringing health and relevance to the church have been tried during the past two decades, some with roots going back to the fifties, others starting afresh in the sixties. They all point to the fact that the church has been sidetracked by its culture, and that it lacks the vitality of the primitive church. The Christian community desires again to have that vitality.

To illustrate what I mean I will list twelve approaches to church renewal.

1. The Civil Rights Movement: By 1960 the most important area of the church's social concern was the Civil Rights movement. During the fifties, Martin Luther King, Jr., a black Baptist minister, had led boycotts, sit-ins, and large-scale freedom marches. By 1963 the Selma

March and the march on Washington, D.C. had involved "liberal" white churchmen, both lay and clergy. Many young ministers, including Robert Spike and Malcolm Boyd, took leadership in the movement. Congregations formed social action committees to find new involvement in the needs of man. King wrote and spoke convincingly of the reasons the Negroes could not wait. Spike challenged the white church with these words:

Because of a sterile view of theology the Church has failed all too frequently in making any difference about its racial practices. She will be a witness for what is essential in the years ahead, only if her faith is radically joined to a realism about human nature, and an expectation that she can do 'all things' with Christ--even help bring about a fundamental reshaping of American society.<sup>1</sup>

King and Spike have since been murdered, yet the significance of their guidance is felt very strongly in the renewal of the church in social action and civil rights.

2. The first great modern church-related project witnessing to the decaying inner-city ghettos began in the fifties with George Webber as its leader. Webber tells of his struggles in the east Harlem community in New York City.

The traditional forms of the churches we knew as children and young men in middle class America have little power or relevance in a community like East Harlem. . . . Tried and true ways of communicating the gospel were of little use.<sup>2</sup>

His book became the guide for churches struggling in great slum areas as it points, both in theory and concrete example, to ways of meeting

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<sup>1</sup>Robert W. Spike, *The Freedom Revolution and the Churches* (New York: Association Press, 1965), p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>George W. Webber, *God's Colony In Man's World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 23.

inner-city needs. This was a beginning of the struggle to make the church relevant to the needs of urban life. The outcome of more radical experimentation will be dealt with later.

3. Important critical reflections on the institutional church were being published by 1961 with Peter Berger,<sup>3</sup> and Gibson Winter<sup>4</sup> lifting up the failure of the church to meet the needs of mankind. These sociologically oriented books called for radical rethinking of the mission of the church. Other critical books followed, with Gibbs and Morton's *God's Frozen People*,<sup>5</sup> calling for lay action, and Pierre Berton's *Comfortable Pew*,<sup>6</sup> probably being the most popular critical statements of the early sixties. In 1967, with Father James Kavanaugh<sup>7</sup> and Samuel Hill,<sup>8</sup> harsh criticisms came to an end and concern shifted toward the more positive possibilities for the church. During these six years the church was called to authentic new and relevant life by the various critical writers.

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<sup>3</sup>Peter L. Berger, *The Precarious Vision* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961).

<sup>4</sup>Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961).

<sup>5</sup>Mark Gibbs and T. Ralph Morton, *God's Frozen People* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965).

<sup>6</sup>Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965).

<sup>7</sup>James Kavanaugh, *A Modern Priest Looks at His Outdated Church* (New York: Trident Press, 1967).

<sup>8</sup>Samuel S. Hill, *Southern Churches In Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967).

4. The "Koinonia Group" movement called church groups into new depths of "sharing, caring, and bearing." Robert Raines' book, *New Life in the Church*, became an instant success and a guide book to renewal through study groups. As he pointed out: "Conversion takes place in Koinonia,"<sup>9</sup> and this was exciting for many in the church who were feeling the squeeze of a new day where old evangelistic forms did not seem effective. Raines observed that "The most concise and adequate term to describe the small group life in its New Testament dimension is *koinonia* . . . We are nothing less than the new creation, the personal and corporate conversion which takes place in *koinonia*."<sup>10</sup>

Out of the small group beginning of Raines, many types of groups have been formed--from social action groups dealing with civil rights or legislative concerns both national and international, to therapy and sensitivity groups. In many areas small groups continue to be of great importance within the church today. Clyde Reid points out in his 1969 book that there are at least nine ways in which small groups are significant.<sup>11</sup>

5. Pastoral counseling was another attempt at church renewal, with an emphasis on psychology and theology for both individuals and groups. Understanding, as a way of renewal, was very much a part of the life of the church in the early sixties. Carl Rogers' "non-

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<sup>9</sup>Robert A. Raines, *New Life In the Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 66.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>11</sup>Clyde Reid, *Groups Alive--Church Alive* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 17-27.



directive" psychological approach was used and developed by men like Seward Hiltner and Howard Clinebell. Mental health was viewed as one of the great needs of mankind, and many churches either called counselors to their staffs or trained their ministers in pastoral counseling. A good example of this concern was expressed by Howard Clinebell when he explained why mental health is a main concern of the church. He points out that mental health is directly linked to the fundamental purpose of the church, as it has been throughout the centuries. Spiritual health and mental health are inseparably related, particularly because of the tragic toll of human agony caused by its absence.<sup>12</sup>

6. Training centers continue to be valuable aids to ministers and laymen in their task of being relevant in their striding toward renewal of the church.

Lay academies as a new teaching method came out of Europe. A good example of an early academy was the German Evangelical Academy. Eberhard Muller writes that the German academy followed three basic steps in a search for renewal, "(a) encounter, (b) reflection, and (c) gathering."<sup>13</sup>

In 1954, the World Council Assembly at Evanston stated a need for lay training in the western hemisphere. This did not become

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<sup>12</sup>Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *Mental Health Through Christian Community* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), pp. 19-21.

<sup>13</sup>Eberhard Muller, *The German Evangelical Academies and Church Renewal* (Nashville: Board of Education of the Methodist Church, 1962), p. 5.

effective until Joseph Matthews and his colleagues set up a lay and clergy curriculum in 1962, known as the Ecumenical Institute. In this they developed highly concentrated forty-four hour weekend courses, dispensing data and involving participants in highly structural settings. Both new content and new method were a part of the course work. Their curriculum continues to be the most significant educational tool in the renewal movement within the church.

7. C.O.C.U. (Consultation on Church Union) has been a dynamic structural renewal project of the sixties. Consultation on Church Union was first precipitated by a sermon entitled, "A Proposal Toward the Reunion of Christ's Church," preached by Eugene Carson Blake in San Francisco, on December 4, 1960. The first exploratory meeting was held in Washington, D.C., April 9 and 10, 1962. By 1963, the first meeting of the new six church C.O.C.U. was held. Studies were set up on the worship and traditions of the various communions.

By 1967, C.O.C.U. was well on its way with the calling of Dr. Paul Crow as its executive secretary. It has been one of the basic tools of liturgical renewal on the American scene. The C.O.C.U. pamphlet on worship states that its aim is "to enrich that 'unity-in-diversity' of traditions of worship from which the creation of new orders of worship may develop for and in the united church of the future."<sup>14</sup>

There can be little doubt, that, as the denominations work

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<sup>14</sup>C.O.C.U., *an Order of Worship* (Cincinnati: Forward Movement Press, 1968).

together, C.O.C.U. will be a major step forward in the renewal of the life of the church.

8. Ferment on a scholarly level came to the forefront with the publishing of Bishop John A. T. Robinson's *Honest to God*<sup>15</sup> in 1963. Robinson pulled together in exciting ways the works of Paul Tillich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer to help people question the basic assumptions of their faith. In this way he started a "renewal" of interest in theology. In 1966, Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton released their writings on "the Death of God" which continued the deep inquiry into the meaning of many of the traditional word symbols which caused many churches to rethink their mission. These studies have been the undergirding of renewal movements for the late sixties and early seventies.

9. The Coffee House Movement, a way of reaching out to the world of youth by the church, first became prominent in the Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C. when Gordon Cosby, the minister, left the institutional church with the conviction that the existing structures were irrelevant, with no possibility for church mission, and that the church must offer itself in crucifixion and death to the security of old structures for the sake of resurrecting new ones.

"The Potter's House" ministry had come into prominence by the time Elizabeth O'Connor wrote her book, *Call to Commitment*,<sup>16</sup> in 1963.

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<sup>15</sup> John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963).

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth O'Connor, *Call to Commitment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

It tells about the Church of the Savior. After an experience in a dead church and a rather lively tavern, Gordon Cosby observed: "If Jesus of Nazareth had His choice He would probably have come to the tavern rather than to the church we visited."<sup>17</sup> Out of this Cosby started the Coffee House Movement which flourished in Washington and in cities throughout the country. Cosby's experience in the Church of the Savior has given meaningful direction for the future. In reading O'Connor's second book, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*,<sup>18</sup> one finds a truly renewed church.

10. Community reformulation was pioneered in Chicago, starting in 1965, under the leadership of Joseph Matthews and the Ecumenical Institute staff which moved to Chicago's west side from Evanston. Matthews was convinced that theology could be not only talk, but also total involvement for mankind.

Community reformation for Matthews included dealing with the area in which the Ecumenical Institute was located--a Black ghetto--and in seeking solutions for the cultural, political, and economic problems facing the residents of that community. The project is known as the Fifth City Project and is built on five presuppositions:

- (1) It must be conducted in a limited geographical area;
- (2) It must deal with the depth human problems to be found in the area;
- (3) It must make use of symbols for identity

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<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>18</sup>Elizabeth O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

building; (4) It must deal with all of the critical problems of a community simultaneously; (5) It must deal with all age levels in the community.<sup>19</sup>

The Institute has developed structures with which to deal with the religious and cultural areas of life and to give guidance to churches serious about community reformulation on behalf of the church. This type of work is one of the expanding areas of renewal in the church.

A good example of another approach is the settlement house approach that is being used in Germantown, Pennsylvania, under the leadership of Robert Raines. He discusses how two ladies (a doctor and a magazine editor) of his church moved into the Black area, became a part of the community, and ministered there. A good summary is found in *The Secular Congregation*.<sup>20</sup>

11. The Urban Training Center concept became a popular educational form during the mid-sixties. The concept was basically one of radical exposure of people to inner-city problems in areas of great need over a short period of time. The best known centers of this type are the Urban Training Center, Chicago, the MUST program in New York's Harlem, and COMMIT of Los Angeles. These centers work and train both lay and clergy.

Closely related with the Chicago project was the creative writer, Stephen Rose, who challenged the church and spoke most prophetically in

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<sup>19</sup> *Image*, No. 4 (Summer, 1967), 8-13.

<sup>20</sup> Robert A. Raines, *The Secular Congregation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

the magazine *Renewal*. His central thrust has been the radical obligation of the church in the political and economic problems of our time. His is a powerful voice in the anti-war movement, and he spoke with a strong political voice in the 1968 presidential election.

During the coming years these projects outside of the local congregation will be doing much of the major educational work and will give guidance to the social involvement areas for the renewed church.

12. Radical experimentation toward more relevant congregational life has been the mode of life for many local congregations since 1966. Out of all the critical writings, the feeling of failure of so many churches, and the present world crisis, many churches have come to the realization that all areas of church life are "up for grabs." In the late sixties great emphasis was being focused on the local congregation and its potentialities for action. Rather than one or two renewal projects, total congregational involvement is seen to be necessary in all areas of the renewal of the church's mission--from worship to social action, from education to pastoral care, and from structural renewal to world renewal. Two of the finest examples include North-haven Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas (see *Tomorrow's Church: A Cosmopolitan Community* by William Holmes)<sup>21</sup> and First Methodist Church in Germantown, Pennsylvania (see *The Secular Congregation* by Robert Raines).<sup>22</sup> Raines, minister of the Germantown church, believes that

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<sup>21</sup>William A. Holmes, *Tomorrow's Church: A Cosmopolitan Community* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), pp. 52-53.

<sup>22</sup>Raines, *The Secular Congregation*.

there is hope for the reshaping of congregational and personal life within conventional structures and insists that churches can be renewed from within. William Holmes of the Dallas church feels that we have to be about the task of renewal in the structures we have until they come alive or they die.<sup>23</sup>

Both of these churches are dealing in radical renewal experiments pointing to the church of the seventies.

Almost every church is involved, in one way or another, in renewal. It is the "in thing" to say "we are renewing the church" even if it is just talk. But it is very clear that when one says "renewal" he can mean several different things--from a small study group to complete community reformation. The term is broad and it is evident that there are many different views of renewal with little unity in the various attempts.

Many have felt frustrated in bringing about renewal in the local congregation, since the focus changes so frequently. One year pastoral counseling is the acceptable thing; the next year it is social action projects, and yet another year, community reformulation.

Within this study, I will deal with the first "renewal movement," the primitive church. I will try to show the great joy and excitement that was theirs, and contrast this to the sickness or individual perversions of worship and social action on the present scene.

Church renewal has been the basic response to the sickness and

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<sup>23</sup>Holmes, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

perversions of the contemporary church. Yet church renewal in its usual forms does not go far enough. The majority of the projects treat symptoms, rather than the disease. As we witness the early church in worship and action we see the health and vitality of a living community, or the "Body of Christ." To restore or to regain this sense of life, I would propose the resurrection of the house church, which has many similarities to the primitive church. The house church is a way in which the church can restore a true sense of community, which is the basis for celebration and response (worship and action).



PART I

THE PRIMITIVE VITALITY

## CHAPTER I

### WORSHIP IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

How often, while reading the New Testament, have most of us thought of the excitement contained in the lives of the disciples or the apostles! When one reads Acts, he feels the overpowering vitality of a time when the Gospel was not a name on a series of books, but a movement, a meaning, the Word, Good News!

The people of the early church came alive through the experience of knowing Jesus Christ. Worship sprang forth, worship that was permeated with joy for the past, excitement in the present, and glorious expectation of the future. The worship of the primitive church took many forms, just as our worship celebrations do today. Each early follower experienced and expressed joy and the excitement of his worship in his unique way.

### THE ORAL TRADITION

There is no set worship service in the New Testament. As the "Good News" spread, worship activities were continued through oral tradition. The Apostle Paul never knew Jesus personally, but his writings show that because of the strength of this tradition, he had a deep understanding of his teachings. Yet, because the tradition of Paul's time was oral, there was a considerable variety of worship forms in the churches that he knew.

As the gospel spread, and local churches came into being, they

received basic instructions on how to perform the eucharist, with their evangelization. The outstanding liturgical historian D. G. Dix points out that early worship came into being by tradition:

It is important for the understanding of the whole future history of the liturgy to grasp the fact that eucharistic worship from the outset was not based on scripture at all, whether of the Old Testament or New Testament, but solely on *tradition*. The authority for its celebration was the historical tradition that had been instituted by Jesus, cited incidentally by S. Paul in I Cor. xi. and attested in the second Christian generation by the written gospels. The method of celebrating it, the primitive outline of the liturgy, was from the first prescribed, not by an authoritative code, but by the tradition of custom alone.<sup>1</sup>

Since the service forms were passed along by oral tradition, various locales had different forms of worship and ways of celebrating the eucharist. It was, therefore, remarkable that most of the services followed approximately the same order. The eucharistic prayers were the only major act expressing local tradition.<sup>2</sup>

The evangelists, and later writers, set out to bring the "Good News," and they adapted their styles and methodology to speak to the people with whom they came in contact.

#### THE PLACE AND TIME OF MEETING

This adaptability is well illustrated in their place and time of gathering. At first the Jewish Christians met at the synagogues. This was their customary place of worship, and Jesus had taught there

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<sup>1</sup>Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1964), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

himself (Mark 14:49). It was only a short time until Temple worship came to an end. William Maxwell points out that there were two basic reasons for this: "First, the great majority of the Jews of the Dispersion had never seen the worship of the Temple. . . . Second, forty years after the death of our Lord, the Temple was destroyed by the Romans and never rebuilt."<sup>3</sup>

Out of adaptation, and for theological reasons, early worship took place in homes. Because of their situation, they developed what we today call the "house church."

The primitive church adapted to its situation. The home was a place to meet, but also it was a place where the community could feel the closeness of a home, "build up the body of Christ," and celebrate the Eucharist. Early in the life of the church, the Eucharist was recognized as central to those of the faith and thus, while being corporate for the believers, was done in seclusion.<sup>4</sup> The Eucharist was central to the home gathering or "the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19) where the Christian family joined in celebrating the "Good News."

The early church created the House Church, since, unlike their Jewish brothers, they did not have a place to worship or did not have to worship in a particular place, but were able to celebrate their lives of faith wherever they met.<sup>5</sup> They seemed to know the joys of

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<sup>3</sup>William D. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Dix, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup>Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1966), pp. 73, 80.

worshipping as a Christian community and thereby witnessed to its historic importance.

The early church also showed its adaptability in setting a day of worship. As the church began, worshippers met together daily (Acts 2:46) for breaking of bread. Some of those within the church continued to observe the Jewish Sabbath, but the community set aside a special day of its own for corporate celebration (Acts 20:7). Sunday was viewed as the prescribed day for the celebration.

Many today are prone to assume that Sunday is a fulfillment of the Sabbath traditions, or fourth commandment, but in reality the underlying ideas of the two are quite different. The religious basis of the Jewish Sabbath was the abstinence from work, with the rabbis giving a "minutely" regulated day of rest. Included in the day of rest was a synagogue service, which was in fact longer than the daily service, since there was more time for it. The Sabbath was based on the fourth commandment with its emphasis on rest from work, not on attendance at public worship.<sup>6</sup>

The early Christian emphasis was quite different. The religious basis of Sunday was corporate worship, the celebration of Christ's resurrection until he returned. "This was the Christian obligation, the weekly gathering of the whole Body of Christ to its Head, to become what it really is, His body."<sup>7</sup> It had nothing to do with obeying a set of laws. Sunday was no different from any other day, except that they

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<sup>6</sup>Dix, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

started this particular day in corporate worship and then went about their everyday tasks. It was the secular edict of Constantine in the fourth century that made Sunday a weekly public holiday.<sup>8</sup>

Each Sunday was a celebration of Christ's resurrection. Each Sunday was an Easter celebration. The observance was the day of resurrection, which was a look backward and forward in a unique way, rather than a commanded day of rest.

The primitive church took existing forms, symbols, rituals, and myths and interpreted or adapted them in order to share their "Good News" with their contemporaries. This was done in the selection of the place and time for their meetings, and also in the various forms or acts of worship. The acts were only as valuable as the meanings they conveyed.

As I suggested earlier, there were certain striking similarities in the different forms of worship. Because of the familiarity of the early Jewish Christians with Jewish worship, many of the Jewish acts of worship were incorporated into Christian worship, reinterpreted and given new significance by the early church. In fact, all of the major activities had Jewish rootage, not because Christians were attempting to hold to tradition alone, but because they were seeking forms that people understood and which could hold new meaning for their new Christian stance in life.

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

## THE FOUR BASIC ACTS

We can illustrate this principle by four basic activities of the church; scriptures, prayers, breaking of bread, and baptism. At each Christian gathering three of the four basic activities took place.

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42) In the early Christian house church, the basic scripture was that of the Old Testament, probably that of the prophets. Here, the Christian church was again acting in the Jewish tradition and giving it new meaning.<sup>9</sup> But even more important was the reading of a writing of an apostle of Christ. Cullmann sites evidence for this idea as he quotes Justin's first Apology (67), describing the service of worship: "the memories of the Apostles (gospels) or the writings of the prophets were read aloud, as long as time allowed."<sup>10</sup> By the time Matthew and Luke were written, various written sources of the Apostles teachings were in circulation.<sup>11</sup>

By reading the prophets and the early writings, the early church was attempting to make a bridge between the prophetic expectations and the reality of Jesus. A good example is found in Matthew, as it attempts to show Jesus leading the people in a "new Exodus" out of

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<sup>9</sup>Cullmann, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>G. H. C. MacGregor, "Acts of the Apostles," in *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954), IX, 50.

bondage to a new life, as their forbears had been led out of bondage by the Exodus. In Mark we find a blending of the prophets and the teachings of Jesus, in an attempt to give the people a reason to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the one leading them to a new life of freedom.<sup>12</sup> The principle here, again, is one of bringing the "Good News" in a meaningful way to the people to whom they spoke.

Prayer had its roots in Jewish worship and its development followed the Old Testament style very closely. Dix illustrates this with an analysis of the early eucharistic prayers of Justin and Hippolytus compared to the Jewish grace. Paragraph by paragraph, the prayer follows the order, and much of the time follows the identical words. They both begin with thanksgiving to God, moving to thanksgiving for redemption, for covenant, for food, and closing by the naming of God.<sup>13</sup>

Once again, one can see how the early church took a common form and appropriated it meaningfully to convey the "Good News." The early church saw prayer in a new twofold dimension, of looking back at the resurrection, and forward toward being together. The oldest liturgical prayer testifies to this dual nature. The Aramatic *Maranatha* "Come Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20), is an imperative "Come!" not an indicative "our Lord is coming."<sup>14</sup> In their worship, the early churchmen grounded themselves in the past. They remembered the post-resurrection

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<sup>12</sup>From a lecture of the Ecumenical Institute, Los Angeles, February 21, 1970.

<sup>13</sup>Dix, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>14</sup>Cullmann, *op. cit.*, p. 13.



appearances at their shared meal, in the present by the meal they were experiencing, and in the future as they looked toward the great Messianic meal.

The earliest of the corporate prayers was the Lord's Prayer. It is important to note the radical seriousness of the spoken prayer. Corporate prayer was a part of the eucharistic service, which came at the close of the worship service. No one had the privilege of joining in the offering of prayers or of partaking of the Eucharist who had not been baptized. Even the catechumens, who had accepted the faith, but had not been baptized, were given a special blessing and then dismissed before the prayers.<sup>15</sup>

Spoken prayer was accepted and meaningful within the community of believers only. This is in contrast to the present time when prayers are spoken at football games, political rallies, P.T.A. meetings, and so forth. Today, to suggest that prayer is only meaningful within the Christian community is a heretical act. In the primitive church the opposite was true. To suggest that prayer should be expressed at public events was heretical. The early church saw prayer beginning in a divine relationship and never leaving that sphere of the divine.<sup>16</sup> This is not to say that individual prayers were not permitted. Individuals could pray directly to Christ in their personal lives.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Dix, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>16</sup>Robert L. Simpson, *The Interpretation of Prayer in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 153.

<sup>17</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, 120.

Prayer was an important part of the life of the early church. They took a familiar form and gave it new meaning. Prayer was not an escape from responsibility in the world; it led to responsible action in the world. To pray meant to act. To pray for a neighbor meant to sacrifice for that neighbor. Prayer in the primitive church led to action and involvement rather than to inaction and uninvolvedness.

The third great act came, in fact, first in the life of the convert. Baptism was essential if one was to participate in the full life of the community. Baptism was a rite that was practiced in the Jewish community, an act done over and over, one not uncommon when Jesus or John came on the scene. It represented a washing or cleansing. The early church retained it and developed new understandings of its meaning.<sup>18</sup> The early church took the existing religious form of baptism and used it as a symbol of a new relationship.

At its beginning there was one simple and direct injunction: "repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Instructions before the act were simple as described in the story of Philip and the eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). Cullmann believes that actually only one liturgical question was asked, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God?"<sup>19</sup> The baptismal formula used is recorded in Matthew "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). The act was done by immersion.

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<sup>18</sup>Dix, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>19</sup>Cullmann, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

It was only a short time until it was essential to have more complex instructions. Yet, as shown in the Didache, the service remained comparatively simple. Before the rite, he who was to do the baptizing fasted. The water was to be "living" or running water, cold, preferably. If immersion was impossible, water was to be poured over the head three times, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Also, we read that it was customary to have the candidate anointed with oil before and after baptism.<sup>20</sup> It was an act once for a lifetime, unlike the Lord's Supper, which was repeated over and over.<sup>21</sup>

What was the message that the primitive church was expressing through the symbol of baptism? Rudolf Bultmann has summarized the meaning in four parts:

- (1) Purification from one's sin in the past (II Peter 1:9)  
... the washing away of sins.
- (2) The naming of 'the name of the Lord' which imparts power to the name ... the candidate is stamped as property of the Kyrios and placed under his protection.
- (3) The bestowal of the Spirit ... this was attached to the special ritual of laying on of hands (Acts 8:17).
- (4) Baptism imparts participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. A conquest over death and the acquisition of life ... Paul puts it 'For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his' (Romans 2:5).<sup>22</sup>

The early church, as shown by Bultmann, had a clear understanding of baptism. We need to be able to interpret symbols of the past as the primitive church did for it to have the same basic powerful impact

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<sup>20</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), pp. 193-194.

<sup>21</sup>Cullmann, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>22</sup>Bultmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-141.

today. Harvey Cox has suggested that three of the early meanings are meaningful in our day. First, he sees the great symbolism of Paul in the passage of the people of Israel through the Red Sea out of captivity and into freedom (I Corinthians 10:1-4). Baptism is a symbol of being freed from our bondage to the world, being freed for service in the world. The exodus symbol is one of freedom.<sup>23</sup>

The second image that Cox sees in baptism is found in the baptism of Jesus himself. Jesus' baptism was not for the purpose of joining the religious community of his day, as our baptism is. His baptism by John the Baptist was a rejection of the Temple religion and an identification with the mob of anticlerical rabble who followed John. As Cox puts it:

This is very stiff medicine to take--that to follow Jesus into the waters of baptism means to turn one's back on the mediated religion of the day and to identify one's self with the rabble; with the alcoholic, with those without the law--and yet the best understanding of the meaning of Jesus' baptism is exactly this. He identifies himself, says Markus Barth, with those who 'had nothing to confess but their sins.'<sup>24</sup>

Today, baptism is seen as a way to enter into an anti-worldly community, while Jesus' baptism was to enter into the world of sinful people.<sup>25</sup>

The third image that Cox lifts out of the New Testament understanding of baptism for today is the crucifixion of Jesus. Paul made great use of the crucifixion in speaking of baptism. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized

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<sup>23</sup>Harvey Cox, *God's Revolution and Man's Responsibility* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1965), p. 93.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

Jesus' death was a summation of his whole life. It was his final effort to break down all barriers of men and to remind them that they are brothers. Walking in the newness of life is a reminder to us to see the world as a place where crucifixion goes on daily and to identify ourselves with those crucified. Walking in newness of life, is a way in which we share in the suffering and death in the world.<sup>26</sup>

Baptism is a way in which we identify our concerns with the world. The early church took a form of their time and gave it a new twist to show a way of participating in the world. Baptism was a vital symbol of the church's concern that its members identify with, and be concerned for all of mankind.

To keep this type of symbolism in the consciousness of its community, the early church used the Eucharist as a reminder of its constant concern for the world.

It has taken several centuries for Protestants to see the importance of the Eucharist in each worship experience. Today it is being recognized once again as central to the gathered church. This is witnessed to in the experimental liturgies of the various churches.

Central to the understanding of worship was the celebration of the Last Supper. This meal was of great importance for the primitive church as it looked to the past and also as it looked to its future.

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<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 94.

To understand the Eucharist one must grasp the meaning of the Last Supper. The Last Supper was held, not as the Passover meal, as many have felt, but rather on the evening before the Passover. It has been suggested that the meal was a "chaburah" which was an informal gathering of friends for a specific purpose, like devotional study. The chaburah was a corporate meeting, generally taking the form of a weekly supper, many times on the eve of the Sabbath or holy days. Each participant shared in the responsibility of providing the food. The purposes of the chaburah were chiefly mutual recreation and social conversation. Since they were Jewish in nature, certain religious blessings were used. Each blessing was well known in the Jewish community, with various ones being given for the various foods. Once the meal started, the blessings were said by the host.<sup>27</sup>

After the ceremonial hand-washing and the grace was said, the head of the household, the leader, or the host would take the bread and bless it saying: "Blessed be thou, O Lord our God, eternal king, who bringest forth bread from the earth." The host then partook, and shared a piece with each person at the table. Each fresh food was blessed by the host. Every person blessed himself each time the wine was refilled.<sup>28</sup>

At the close of the meal an attendant brought a basin and a napkin, at which time hands were washed again. After the meal there was another grace, sometimes called the Blessing, or the Benediction. Dix points out that the word "blessing" could be considered

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<sup>27</sup>Dix *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 52.

"Thanksgiving" and cites Paul as using the term when he said, "the cup of blessing." At the end of the Thanksgiving, the cup was sipped by all and passed around. The meeting closed with the saying of a psalm and then broke up.<sup>29</sup>

As we study the early chaburah, we see striking similarities between the fellowship or friendship meal and the early church's observance of the Lord's Supper. In his lengthy presentation Dix points out that what Jesus actually did was not to institute a new custom, but to take a universal Jewish custom and give it a unique new meaning for his own chaburah (fellowship).<sup>30</sup> The key to the meal was not the fact that Jesus said "do this"; because he knew they would be doing it. The key phrase was "in remembrance of me." He used the exact phrasing twice to emphasize this important point.<sup>31</sup>

The form of the rite had seven parts to it: Our Lord (1) took bread; (2) 'gave thanks' over it; (3) broke it; (4) distributed it saying certain words; (5) took a cup; (6) 'gave thanks' over that; (7) handed it to his disciples, saying certain words.<sup>32</sup>

The Christians met together daily, weekly, or irregularly, to enjoy each other, to share, and to eat together. Their sharing was one of great joy and expectation of the coming of Christ. Each brought food for the mutual need. Slaves might bring leftovers from a feast

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>31</sup>C. F. D. Moule, *Worship in the New Testament* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), p. 33.

<sup>32</sup>Dix, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

they had served. At the beginning of the meal (which was a real meal, not a token meal), the president, whoever he might be, would take the bread and bless it, or break into words of praise to God for his creation, and especially for Jesus Christ, and recall the words Jesus had said about his blood and body at the Last Supper. By the time of the writing of the Didache, the offering of praise had shifted to the offering of the eucharistic prayer. The president had a fixed form, with only the "prophets" having free expression in prayer. When the prayer was concluded, the leader would break the single loaf and distribute it. Then the meal would proceed with general conversation, much like church fellowship suppers today, except with more emphasis on the Christ. After the supper, the second blessing was made, this time over the cup. Here again the past, present, and future were lifted up. Then the president would sip the cup and pass it around for each to drink.<sup>33</sup>

It is easy to see why some scholars feel that the early Lord's Supper was a carryover from the chaburah and that the tradition was not new, but, rather, an old Jewish tradition to which Jesus gave special new meaning.

Various interpretations have been made concerning the meaning of the Lord's Supper. Generally, they deal with the way in which one views the significance of Christ. In the Jewish community, they saw Christ as the one being the great sacrifice on their behalf (sacrificial

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<sup>33</sup>Moule, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.



theory). Paul tried to restore the value of remembering the sacrifice that Christ had made. Other early Christians looked forward with great joy toward the future since it now was possible to live into the future (eschatological theory).

The early Jewish Christian community saw the meal basically in the sacrificial term. The messianic hope of a suffering servant seemed to them to take on new meaning in the words of Jesus in the Eucharist. In witnessing Christ's death, his person and his whole action toward God particularly as in the Lord's Supper, the messianic, redeeming significance seemed to be most clear for them.<sup>34</sup> Jesus, in his words at the Last Supper was clearly saying that his life had great sacrificial significance.

Feeling that they were the true Israel, they were not satisfied with talking about a simple sacrifice at Golgotha, so they worked out a sacrificial understanding of the Eucharist for their worship.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, the Apostle Paul spoke in sacrificial terms with such statements as: "The Cup of Blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?" (I Corinthians 10:16). Paul felt that as one eats the bread and drinks the cup in the Eucharistic service, he shares in Christ's sacrificial life, being united with Christ and his fellow Christians. The emphasis here is on the body of Christ taking visible form during the Eucharist. The awareness of

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<sup>34</sup>Dix, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>35</sup>Hans Lietzmann, *The Foundation of the Church Universal* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 129.

participation with another is essential, for this is the body of Christ taking form. Unity of all participating is essential in this view.

C. F. D. Moule lifts up the fact that in John (6:51) and Hebrews (10:19-25), daring language is used about eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man for two basic reasons:

First, that the real incarnation must be taken with brutal seriousness and not refined away into some sort of 'docetic' notions; and secondly, that salvation is not merely by seeing and listening and learning but by 'assimilating' Christ: by so taking into one's life the surrendered life of Christ that new life and strength come into one's character.<sup>36</sup>

Rudolf Bultmann is convinced that the central phrase for the sacrificial understanding comes from Paul when Paul used the words of the Lord "this is my body," "this is my blood." This signifies a partaking with the Kyrios. The Lord's Supper brought about "Communion" or partnership with the Lord.<sup>37</sup>

It is most important to note that sacrifice in the New Testament is seen differently than it is in the Old Testament. Sacrifice appears in many places, yet never is the sacrifice of the Lord's Supper seen as a way one gains merit before God. One participates with human gratitude to God for His initiative in giving Himself. The Eucharist in the New Testament is not the sacrifice itself, nor are the loaf and the cup. They are means or ways to participate in the sacrifice already achieved (I Corinthians 10:16; Hebrews 9:12). It is more accurate to speak of entering into the sacrifice of Christ, rather than of making an offering

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<sup>36</sup>Moule, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup>Bultmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-148.

of sacrifice to God.<sup>38</sup>

Many of the early observers of the Eucharist became so jubilant in their celebration of the great day to come that some became drunk and unmindful of the death of Christ. The Apostle Paul set out to bring the pendulum back into balance, as he called them to remember the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

This remembrance of the sacrifice gained great emphasis from the words of our Lord, who used the term twice "do this in remembrance of me," highly emphasizing the importance of remembering Him in the meal.

Some traditions have picked up the "remembrance" theme and have taken it to great extremes. In these traditions the Lord's Supper is done for the main purpose of remembering Jesus. This is witnessed to by many Communion tables with the words, "Do this in remembrance of me." In the early church the remembrance was related, not just to remembering the Last Supper, but to the sacrificial understanding of the Lord's Supper.

The "sacrificial theory" was looking back, but along with this theory was the "eschatological theory" or looking forward. The sacrificial theory put its emphasis on the historic happening, while at the same time, in the primitive church, the Lord's Supper put great importance upon its eschatological character, or the looking forward to the fulfillment of God's design. Each meal had such an emphasis.<sup>39</sup> Each meal could be characterized as one of great rejoicing over the thought

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<sup>38</sup> Moule, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

of the resurrection and the hope of the messianic meal to come.<sup>40</sup>

For Bultmann, the basic character of the common meal in the early church was one of an eschatological consciousness of the community. In Acts 2:42-47 we see that there always prevailed a mood of "gladness" which was due to the eschatological joy.<sup>41</sup>

The early prayers in the Didache witness to the great eschatological mood which filled the congregation at the meals. Their chief content was petition for eschatological fulfillment: "Remember, Lord, thy Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in thy love, and gather it together in its holiness from the four winds to thy kingdom which thou hast prepared for it! . . . Let (the Lord) come, and let this world pass away!"<sup>42</sup>

Jesus himself lifted the eschatological theme in the Last Supper as he said: "I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day I drink when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25).

For the primitive church the Lord's Supper has been an eschatological meal, which binds the Word and the sacraments into the world scene. The meal was never a "churchly affair" alone, but a looking forward to the Messianic banquet for all the nations. It was a look toward the final bringing together of all the broken relationships of mankind.<sup>43</sup> The eschatological meal dramatized the leaving of the old

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<sup>40</sup>Cullmann, *op. cit.*, p. 16.      <sup>41</sup>Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 42, quoting *Didache* 10:5f.

<sup>43</sup>Carl E. Bratten, *The Future of God* (New York: Harper & Row,

world and the moving into a new world. Joy was the characteristic feature which came from the great hope in the future.<sup>44</sup>

Their communion was not an attempt to play or act out the Last Supper, nor a mere memorial supper. They were sorrowful concerning the sacrifice, but their experience was one of great joy, one of celebration of the fact that Christ had been raised as the Lord of the future.

Today, we are recognizing that the supper was indeed an eschatological meal, which has been the very center of the Christian faith. A current exponent of the "theology of hope," Jürgen Moltmann, lifts up what eschatology means to the church as he says:

From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatological, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day. For Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ, and strains after the promise of the universal future of Christ.<sup>45</sup>

This type of hope and expectation is lacking from the majority of Eucharist services in the present day church. Most make a great deal of the memorial understanding, taking the words "Do this in remembrance of me" as their basis. Therefore, we find, as noted earlier, the "individualistic," almost funeral-like atmosphere at the Service. It seems

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1969), pp. 119-120.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>45</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 16.

to separate people, rather than to build community, and to give a basic feeling of despair, rather than of joy.

To make the contemporary service meaningful, we must again experience corporate messianic meals of expectation, the meal of hope of all mankind and nations. There is a great need to once again "celebrate" the Lord's Supper. Harvey Cox points out that celebration, or "festivity," is that which enables man to relate to the past and to the future.

The festival, the special time when ordinary chores are set aside while man celebrates some event, affirms the goodness of what is, or observes the memory of a god or hero, is a distinctly human activity. It arises from man's peculiar power to incorporate into his own life the joys of other people and the experience of previous generations. Porpoises and chimpanzees may play. Only man celebrates. Festivity is a human form of play through which man appropriates an extended area of life, including the past, into his own experience.<sup>46</sup>

The primitive common meal, or Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, had two themes: sacrifice of Christ and expectation of Christ. Out of their basic remembrance of the life style of Jesus and the looking toward the final reconciling of all mankind, the early church worshipped. But this view of history put a great claim upon the early Christian lives. If they believed in the imminent coming of the Lord, they had not only to be ready themselves, but also to prepare the world. The great eschatological vision laid a great demand upon them in their understanding of the world.

Their joy could not be contained in the worship service or in

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<sup>46</sup>Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 7.

the Eucharist alone, but flowed out into the world with the people. Much of the problem today is that that which happens in our services carries into the world a somber, funeral-like feeling.

If the feeling of the worship is one of joy and of the exciting expectation of bringing in a new and better world, this will be the message--A Risen Lord--creating a better world. What happens in worship is vital because it affects the world. Harvey Cox puts it this way:

Man affirms the flesh in the house of God. What is even more important however is the rebirth of festivity in the culture at large. What Christianity permits to happen in church buildings is important namely as a clue to what it encourages in the culture. An anti-festive church drives the dancer not only out of the temple but out of the streets and houses too, if it has the power. . . . A church may lend its support to a less repressive social order.<sup>47</sup>

It is this type of joyous worship and jubilant expectation that ties all the elements of a congregation together. To know the Risen Lord affects deeply the education, the use of the building, the use of money, its message to mankind, and, most of all, its actions and deeds in the world. How this eschatological understanding affects the action of the early church and how it affects worship and action today will be dealt with later.

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<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 55.

## CHAPTER II

### SOCIAL WITNESS IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

#### BACKGROUND FOR CARE AND WITNESS

Ever since the great Reformation of the sixteenth century, the Bible has been the most basic book for proving points (or what is commonly known as proof texting) in the world. It has been used to prove points on both sides of arguments, from how man got into the world, to how man leaves the world.

The art of arguing a point continues today. In the recent past, one of the main questions has dealt with the involvement of the church in the world. Was the church a social action power body or was it a group concerned only with man's inner life or spirit?

We have said earlier that the worship service sent its people into the world joyously, with great concern for the world. That the primitive church was concerned about the world there can be little question. But if one looks to the scriptural witness of the New Testament churches to find the fiery radical approach to social issues, he will be disappointed and he will be well advised to turn the pages back to the Old Testament and the prophets.

Yet the concern of the world to know that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour and that all men are brothers seems central to the New Testament witness. Their type of ministry would nevertheless be more that of pastoral care or pastoral concern toward a small group. The primitive church was a small, politically powerless group of individuals



who were very much alive with the great joy of a risen Lord and the great hope of a world in which He would be forthcoming. They worshipped in this faith and set out to build a community within it.

They had, basically, a threefold task. The first was to become a community of people. The second was to develop a style of ministry that would carry out the ministry of their risen Lord. The third was to build a community that carried out their ministry in a meaningful way to their time and situation. All three were important in the creation of the church of Jesus Christ.

The first task was to tie themselves together into a lasting community. Their church was not to be a temporary thing. It was to last until the Lord came again. Most of them expected that the church would last for a short time but that their lives together were permanent.

This was not the easiest task in the world. The first Christians saw great anxieties about the future: anxiety from within (what did it all mean?) and anxiety from without (political, social powers). Their first action was that of worshipping or celebrating life together. The Eucharist was taken quite seriously--looking back at what had happened and looking forward with great anticipation and hope. As they celebrated, a feeling of oneness and community developed.

As they celebrated and thought upon Jesus' ministry and looked at his death, burial, and resurrection, life took on new dimensions and new direction.<sup>1</sup> All of this was exciting, but also they had to face

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<sup>1</sup>Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 48.

the realities of the way life is.

As they looked around, they found themselves in hostile territory. As Paul described their situation, he called it "the present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). There was a deep feeling that, if a person were not in the community, he was hostile and evil. Much of this feeling was due to the fact that many in the church were poor. They felt the injustice and inequality that came to the poor.<sup>2</sup> They realized that they had little if any power, politically or socially.

It was but a short time until there was no question but that to be a community was no easy task, since by 64 A.D., the Nerorean persecutions in Rome had begun. At first there was no official charge against being Christian, but the Christians were charged as arsonists. But by 90 A.D., to be in the Christian community had become reason enough for punishment. By 111-113 A.D., we find in the exchange of correspondence between Trajan and Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, that Christianity was viewed as criminal. The charges dealt with their reflection of the old gods, which seemed atheistic and their refusal to join in emperor worship, which itself was treason. Since the early community was small, and was still trying to develop itself, it kept comparatively quiet and the persecutions were generally minor.<sup>3</sup>

As we mentioned in the section on worship, the early meetings were held in homes. This has theological reasons (Christ worship,

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<sup>2</sup> Cecil John Cadoux, *The Early Church and the World* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1925), pp. 102-103.

<sup>3</sup> Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), pp. 44-45.

rather than temple worship), and practical reasons (no building). It was also a practical way to keep from being persecuted. It wouldn't be far wrong to call the early church the first "underground house church" movement.

In their task of self-preservation as a group, or community, they saw themselves as a family and sometimes used the title "the Body of Christ." As it began with only a few, the family spirit of joy and suffering was very real and present. They experienced this tie in worship, but, they also experienced it in all things. The Apostle Paul summed it up this way: "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with him, while if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with him" (I Corinthians 12:26). The experience of the family, or of one brotherhood, prevailed in all of their experiences as a community.<sup>4</sup>

To be unconcerned about one's neighbor, or the least of God's children, was to betray the love shared in the Eucharist experience. Loyalty to the family came first. The first phase of the church was to build a community upon love--love from God in Jesus Christ--love to the neighbor in behalf of God. This was the most distinguishing characteristic, "He who loves his brother abides in the light" (I John 2:10). As the primitive church experienced love, their joy was reflected in their involvement in the world. They witnessed to true community.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (New York: C. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), I, 180-181.

<sup>5</sup>Suzanne de Dietrich, *God's Unfolding Purpose* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 248-249.

The second task of the primitive church was to be faithful to the ministry that their risen Lord had set before them. This was not always easy, since Jesus had been a man very much involved in the world: He was what we might call a free agent as he related to the "evil" of the world, the sinners, drunkards, and tax collectors. The primitive church was somewhat withdrawn from the world in an attempt to better understand itself and its mission. But Jesus' description of his ministry was also a good description of the type of ministry for which the early church took responsibility. As Jesus began his ministry he took it from the style that Isaiah had laid out: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18).

Cadoux has suggested that the primitive church took four basic ethical principles from Jesus to use in their community: love, truthfulness, humble service, and prudence.<sup>6</sup>

First, the principle of love to the neighbor was basic to the community and to an understanding of Jesus, who taught that it was only second in importance to loving God. This was a very inclusive type of love, not limited to one race or group but for all mankind.

The second principle was of truthfulness and responsibility to each other. Any genuine relationship must be based upon honesty and

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<sup>6</sup>Cadoux, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-29.

integrity, with no place for false-witness, hypocrisy, and pretense. The "Body of Christ" was to be built on integrity.

Third, the community stressed humble service. The service for each other was not the type that was for the "press," or done to give one a "good feeling," but rather the serving of a neighbor because he was the neighbor. At first, humble service was done within the community of believers, but it gradually moved out into the world.

Fourth, prudence was an important principle. It took serious discipline and wise decisions on all issues to become the living "Body of Christ" in the world.

These four principles laid guidelines for a new ministry of love to the world. In addition to these, a sense of freedom was to be imparted. Jesus' message was for men to pick up their lives and live as free men, and that the elements which enslaved men could be overcome.

The third task of the primitive church was to meet the contemporary needs of the people it was serving. If we wanted to prove certain social action projects today by the use of the New Testament witness in literal ways we would have difficulty. The facts show a course of meeting only those needs which were pressing in their situation.

Slavery was a part of the state or Roman system. To attack slavery would have meant to conquer the Roman Empire, so the question never really became a major issue for them.<sup>7</sup> Rather than trying to change the system they dealt with it on a community level, dealing with

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<sup>7</sup>Harnack, *op. cit.*, I, 167.

the responsibility of the slave owner and the slave to each other. They held up the dignity of each man, and called for the other to do the same.

The contemporary issue of military service is another example of an issue which was not a great problem for the primitive church. In the early days of the church, Christians were classed with the Jews who were legally disqualified from military service. Also, much like Judaism, the early Christians interpreted war as being divinely controlled, as were wars in Hebrew history and the Messianic wars. Furthermore, it is clear that the military was little problem for the Apostle Paul, since he used many military terms to define the Christian faith. It is interesting that Paul used such terms, since soldiers were not the most popular or kind people in the society. Furthermore, we have no record of early Christian writers condemning Christians in the service or demanding that one leave the military on being a convert.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, throughout the early Christian literature there is implied the incompatibility of Christianity and bloodshed. Also, there is no record of any Christian entering the military after becoming a Christian. This would seem to imply that after becoming a Christian, a person would not enter the military. This would seem to be consistent with Christian understanding of the world. For to go into the military, a person would face the possibility of contamination from idolatry. Also, out of their Christian convictions, probably there

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<sup>8</sup>Cadoux, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-120.

arose conscientious objection to war and the bearing of arms.<sup>9</sup> Yet we find no direct answers in the New Testament witness concerning war or slavery since these were not the problems being dealt with.

If we want to deal with such questions as segregation or the moral problem of war and the church, we must, as did the early Christian community within their limitations, look at the deeper underlying theology of the Christian faith. We must define what the love of a risen Lord means in our day and society.

The basic reason many social issues did not arise was the fact that within the new community there was a oneness, a brotherhood, a communal understanding of life. Their main interest was in developing and nourishing this community. Problems of the world which did not relate to the community were not dealt with by them. There was great interest in the religious questions, and we find the rise of a religious order rather than social order. They concerned themselves with the questions of salvation, life after death, life disciplines, worship, etc. Troeltsch points out that "the religious idea itself neutralized secular distinctions, and with the depreciation of political and economic values the barriers between races were removed."<sup>10</sup>

It was only natural that a community which had no class or racial barriers would appeal to the lower classes, and many joined the church. What started out as basic religious concern slowly turned to other

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>10</sup> Ernest Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), I, 49.

concerns due to the social situation.<sup>11</sup> As more of the lower class entered the community, suddenly new problems arose. Economic problems abounded, and now the church, like it or not, was not only dealing with "religious" questions but with other real life needs of mankind.

The needs, the problems of mankind, were on their doorstep. Before any great social reforms of society could be considered, the basic needs of a new community had to be met and dealt with.

#### FORMS OF CARE

We shall see how the principles of family love were expressed in action and care for their community and how they developed into world concern.

The first concern that is recorded is the concern for the widows, who were being neglected (Acts 6). Little discussion was needed. The need was there and the church met it. This was not a passing problem, but one that continued, and the early church played an important part in society as a whole in dealing with it. It was mentioned at one point by Bishop Cornelius that the Roman Church alone was supporting 1,500 widows and poor persons.<sup>12</sup>

The support of the widows is a good example of meeting a concern at hand and of tying worship activity and social activity together. As the early writer, James, put it: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in

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<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, I, 50.

<sup>12</sup>Harnack, *op. cit.*, I, 159.



their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27).

One of the great issues of our time--poverty--was also a big concern for them, as many in the church were poor. Other needs which were dealt with were care for the sick, the disabled, prisoners and their families, and those hit by natural disasters.

With zeal and excitement the early Christians developed ways to fulfill Jesus' style and statement of ministry ("He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" Luke 4:18). Out of their understanding of this ministry, actions were initiated.

After observing the healing done by Jesus, the early disciples tried to continue this important ministry. If a cure was impossible, one of the early functions was visitation of the sick. It is not uncommon to find mention of the deacons, "widows," and deaconesses being set apart for the caring of the sick and disabled members of the community. Harnack cites two examples in the Apostolic Constitutions:

They are to be doers of good works, exercising a general supervision day and night, neither scorning the poor nor respecting of the rich; they must ascertain who are in distress and not exclude them from a share in the church funds, compelling also the well-to-do to put money aside for good works.<sup>13</sup>

The early church did such an excellent job of caring for its own in the beginning that many became Christian because of it.<sup>14</sup> At this point the relief and help began to move outside of the community. The Apostle

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<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, I, 161.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

Paul was quite clear in this as he points out: "Let us do good to all men" (Galatians 6:10). This resembles a statement by Tertullian: "disburses more money in the streets than your religion in the temples."<sup>15</sup>

Julian attested to the church's fine care for itself and for non-Christians: "These godless Galileans feed not only their own poor but ours; our poor lack our care."<sup>16</sup> As the early Christians involved themselves for others the church became involved for the sake of mankind. In fact, the care and concern of the church was its greatest evangelistic method.

The early churchmen were deeply concerned about those of their number imprisoned for their faith, or for being in debt. Whatever the reason for imprisonment, they were concerned because they were their brothers. Visiting helped and encouraged them, consoled them and helped them with having food. (Hebrews 10:34: "For you had compassion on the prisoners.") Ordinarily, this was the responsibility of the deacons, and because of the risks of getting into the prison some were martyred. The martyred number was small since many of the guards were impressed by the loyalty of one Christian to another. Here again we see that their care for each other was an impressive witness to guards and to the world.<sup>17</sup>

As early as scriptural times, the church was helping those afflicted by natural calamities. In Hebrews 10:34 "for you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of

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<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, I, 162, quoting Apol. xlii.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, quoting Sozom. v. 16.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, I, 162-165.

your property, since you knew that you yourself had a better possession and an abiding one." When disasters came, or calamities occurred, their presence of care and help was there.

A special interest and concern that we have today was the attitude of the early church toward slaves. What seems so clear to us today, that slavery is an evil that needs to be done away with, was not a problem in the early church. "The primitive Christians looked on slavery with neither a more friendly nor a more hostile eye than they did upon the State and legal ties. They never dreamt of working for the abolition of the State, nor did it ever occur to them to abolish slavery for humane or other reasons--not even amongst themselves.

. . . Slaves are earnestly admonished to be faithful and obedient."<sup>18</sup>

The Apostle Paul was the dominant voice in the question. Even though he might have had objections at several points, many situations, as mentioned earlier, helped to keep the question from arising. They were concerned with how the best could be made of it. The greatest reason for Paul not to change was the expectation of the Parousia (the second coming of Christ).<sup>19</sup>

Paul was concerned with the relationship between the slave owner and the slaves' well-being. He also expected the slave to love and obey his master. Paul was acting out of his basic understanding that slavery was just a part of the law of the State which Christianity could not alter. Since it had moral guarantees for the slaves, he

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 167.

<sup>19</sup> Cadoux, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

backed it.

Troeltsch points out that one of the main justifications was that slavery was due to the fall of man.

In the opinion of Christian thinkers this right to possess slaves was due, like all law, to the Fall, and since then it has been an institution which God has permitted to exist. It was due originally to excessive human greed--above all; to the curse of Noah on the irreverent Shem. The State is based upon the original misdeeds of humanity, and the particular institutions of slavery is founded upon the same basis of error. Thus, it is true that it is only human laws which makes distinction between slave and freemen, but, like all the other contrasts which makes up the State, the institution of slavery is a form of discipline in the Hands of God. And in this sense namely, the law of the State, which keeps the slave in bonds, is also appointed by God; thus it may not be transgressed so long as it does not demand from the slave anything which displeases God.<sup>20</sup>

So slavery continued without objection from the church. They were, however, concerned about slave marriages. Also they urged non-Christians to set their slaves free so that they would have more freedom religiously or at least to let them buy their freedom. The church was concerned, and gave much attention to certain changes in the condition of slaves. The basic spiritual point was, since there was no difference between male and female, Jew and Greek (or slave and slave owner), to impart to the slave a deep feeling of his moral dignity before God and man.<sup>21</sup>

Harnack has suggested that there were five basic ways the church attempted to give meaning to slaves:

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<sup>20</sup>Troeltsch, *op. cit.*, I, 133.

<sup>21</sup>Cadoux, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-134.

(a) Converted slaves, male or female, were regarded in the full sense of the term as brothers and sisters from the standpoint of religion.

(b) They shared the rights of church members to the fullest extent. Slaves could even become clergymen, and in fact bishops.

(c) As personalities (in the moral sense) they were to be just as highly esteemed as freemen. The sex of female slaves had to be respected, nor was their modesty to be outraged.

(d) Masters and mistresses were strictly charged to treat all their slaves humanely, but, on the other hand, to remember that Christian slaves were their own brothers. Christian slaves, for their part, were told not to disdain their Christian masters, they were not to regard themselves as their equals.

(e) To set a slave free was looked upon, probably from the very beginning, as a praiseworthy action; otherwise, no Christian slave could have had any claim to be emancipated. Although the primitive church did not admit any such claim on their part, least of all any claim of this kind on the funds of the church, there were cases in which slaves had their ransom paid for out of such funds.<sup>22</sup>

Even with all of its barbarous penalties and great injustices for slaves, the church continued to operate within the legal structures of the Roman Empire which sanctioned slavery. Slavery would be a good example of how the Christian attitude, which renounced the world, at the same time compromised with it. Their basic concern was to deal with their own people in love (slave or non-slave), with little hope of changing the social system.<sup>23</sup>

Besides caring for its own people, the early church took responsibility for its sister churches. One of the first ways the early church practiced concern outside of its own local community was to

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<sup>22</sup>Harnack, *op. cit.*, I, 177-180.

<sup>23</sup>Troeltsch, *op. cit.*, I, 133.

traveling Christians from other churches. In Justin's *Apology*, he records the fact that strangers on their travels were included in the list of those who receive support from church offerings. This was one of the few corporate adventures of church business, not just leaving it for individuals to take care of, although it is clear that individuals were hospitable. The first part of Hebrews 13 begins: "Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware" (Hebrews 13:1-2).

It was its great hospitality to others that put the Roman church in a powerful position. Being the only major See in the West, its practice of practical hospitality helped it to gain its position of power. The early church guarded against "free-loaders," giving the travelers and strangers jobs or work to do. Later, a Christian would take a letter from the home church with him when he traveled.<sup>24</sup>

As travelers provided interchange between churches, needs of the various churches began to be known, with great sympathy and care for distant churches in peril and distress. The traveler acted as a messenger and relayed the problems of distress and suffering of his home church. Out of their mutual faith in Jesus Christ and their feeling of a mutual calling they joined together. They took Paul seriously when he said: "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (I Corinthians 12:26). These bonds were felt very strongly from church to church. The same love, patience,

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<sup>24</sup>Harnack, *op. cit.*, I, 177-180.

Christian discipline, and hope stimulated great brotherly love between churches, making strangers and strange churches friends in the faith. The spirit of one brotherhood was present and strong.

Several examples of this brotherhood could be cited, for example in Acts 11:27. The church in Antioch, upon hearing of a famine in Judea, "the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea." It was the young Gentile church that took responsibility for its Judean sister church.

Poverty at the Jerusalem church seemed to be a constant condition and the other churches took responsibility for helping their brothers. Paul continued to work between churches and to help them feel the importance of acting to help their sister churches.

As we study the various forms of caring, we find that the spirit of brotherhood and oneness was felt in their experiences of worship, and in their awareness of the sacrifice of Christ and the great joy of a family looking toward the great event of history carried forth as they created the new community; a community ready to receive the living Lord any moment in the Eucharistic service.

Since the Parousia did not occur, we must look behind their forms of social service and action to find basic truths for guides to social action of our churches today.

#### GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SOCIAL WITNESS

The early church had the ministry of Jesus Christ as a basis of social involvement. The only guide for ministry the early church had

was the example of the ministry of Christ. It is interesting that Jesus was represented in many forms of social ministry: a compassionate healer or counselor, teacher, and even agitator of the religious leaders.

Because of the basic struggles attending the beginning of a community, such as the problems of self-preservation and self-identity, the early church affirmed the compassionate role. Nevertheless there are glimpses of the church being very threatening to the social order. They were referred to as those people who are "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

The church today has picked up many of the pastoral concerns of the early church, such as counseling, homes for the aged and orphans, programs of ministry to those in prison and those in hospitals, and working with sister churches in corporate projects to meet specific needs of people, such as in a time of natural disaster.

Jesus' ministry pointed to other principles that speak to us today. First, he was a "worldly" man. Much of the time the early church seemed concerned with its own community problems only. This is characteristic of a group trying to get started. The early church realized it needed to deal with its own problems first.

A social action cadre I was associated with in a congregation found that the local schools had more than fifty per cent non-white students, yet no non-white teachers. The cadre felt compelled to bring this to the attention of the school board, until one of the cadre members pointed out that the local congregation had only a handful of



non-white members. First, the cadre had to deal with its own congregation, before it went into the world.

The early church was a captive of its own culture, limited in dealing with a wide spectrum of the concerns of its day. Therefore, the emphasis should be on following the example set by Jesus in this respect, rather than that set by the primitive church.

Jesus was very much involved with the so-called people of the world: "And the scribes and the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners'" (Mark 2:16-17).

Jesus' ministry was not confined to the institutional walls of the temple, but went into the streets where man's needs were great. As the primitive church developed, it moved into the streets of the world. So we today must affirm the ministry to the world of Jesus and realize that this is where the church today must be finding new forms of ministry.

Secondly, Jesus was concerned about the dignity of mankind. He found worth in all people, whether they were prostitute or drunkard. His message was one of the love of God which gives man his dignity. The Apostle Paul picked this up as he spoke to Philemon concerning the return of Onesimus, the slave, "Take him back, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother" (Philemon 16).

This witness to the dignity of mankind was in all of Jesus' activity with men. He came to free them. Out of the faith of individuals he healed them and freed them to live as persons with great dignity and worth. "Take heart, your faith has made you well" (Matthew 9:22). The early church continued to find ways to free men and to give them dignity. They were concerned, and entered deeply into the suffering of mankind, laying out a major principle of the church today.

Thirdly, Jesus dealt with authority with each problem or situation as it arose, with a response fitting for each need or problem. He seemed unafraid to risk himself for what he felt to be right and necessary. A good example was the cleansing of the temple: "And Jesus entered the temple of God and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons" (Matthew 21:12-13). Jesus called the Christian to prophetic criticism.

The primitive church witnessed to the fact that God is at work seeking to make men more human and that it is the task of the church to be there.<sup>25</sup> Whether it be for widows, or blacks in a ghetto, there the church must be. We are challenged to be open and creative in our attempts to minister and to deal with all types of needs. Once again, the "People of God" must have a prophetic criticism in the light of the promised future given by God.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> George W. Webber, *The Congregation In Mission* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 68.

<sup>26</sup> Carl E. Bratten, *The Future of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 159.

Fourthly, Jesus called his people to be a special community. Jesus worked with a group of twelve; it could have been more, but he chose only twelve. The early church worked in small communities, meeting as house churches. The small group, or community, concept picked up the caring, sharing, rejoicing aspect of life, in a form that no large group could.

The primitive churchmen carried this out in their worship as they shared the past as well as expectation of the future. This sharing continued in all things.

The greatest of the presuppositions that the early church acted out of, which tied the community together, was its great eschatological hope. Eschatology was the central element in tying together the worship of the church and its action.

One of the basic understandings of the primitive church was that it existed as a sign of the hope of the world that the future is in the hands of God.

Christian eschatology does not speak of the future as such. It sets out from a definite reality in history and announces the future of that reality, its future possibilities and its power over the future. Christian eschatology speaks of Jesus Christ and his future.<sup>27</sup>

Their eschatological message was an exciting one, full of hopes and longing, praying "Thy Kingdom come." The power of the future was their message of the risen Christ's future for mankind.<sup>28</sup> The resurrection

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<sup>27</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Bratten, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

of Christ was historic in the sense that it is the way of the future for mankind; it makes it possible to live because of knowing it.<sup>29</sup>

The eschatological hope led to the practical world of mission, to an unredeemed world, with a message of a cross where all hope is found.<sup>30</sup> Moltmann points out that the only way we can understand the early church's zeal is through their eschatological hopes, as seen in its great missionary proclamation. The proclamation was not just words, but service to the world. Or as he puts it:

The commission to apostolic service in the world was held to be *the* word of the risen Lord. His appearances were vocatory appearances by which the men involved were set to follow the footsteps of the mission of Jesus. By the revelation of the risen Lord the men involved were identified with the mission of Jesus and thus placed in the midst of history which is instituted and determined by the mission of Jesus and by his future as revealed and made an object of hope in the fore-glow of Easter.<sup>31</sup>

The early Christian consciousness of history was framed in the divine commission of the Lord of hope which was always a missional undertaking of bringing hope to mankind. Their mission was their greatest form of evangelism. As people saw this new life style, they were drawn to it. As people saw, they believed.

All aspects of the early church centered around the hope given them by the rising of the Lord, a hope for the brotherhood and for the oneness of all mankind. Their hope led to a desire to prepare a better world for the risen Lord.

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<sup>29</sup>Moltmann, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 202.

There was, therefore, a celebration (worship) pointing to that event which makes life possible and meaningful. There was also a determination to take this message to the world and to give the world the freedom and the possibility to live in the reality of the great event of history. Once again, the church must lift its eyes to the great future God has given.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Bratten, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

PART II

THE CURRENT SICKNESS

## CHAPTER III

### PRESENT DAY PERVERSIONS OF WORSHIP

Each week, in the newspapers of our great cities, worship services are advertised, with the sermon title and the service time. In the paper, they all look much the same, but in actuality they are not. Rather than having fewer types of services, more new types are developing out of both the ultra "churchly" type and the "secular" type.

The typical church member understands his life in relationship to a "personal Jesus." His meaning for life is found in the Bible. This type of understanding has flaws which must be dealt with today since they lead to a serious misunderstanding of the church's mission in a contemporary setting. The two basic worship perversions that I see are worship as a ritual for creating a mood, and worship as a ritual of separation holding little relationship to other areas of life.

#### WORSHIP AS A RITUAL FOR SETTING A MOOD

What young minister has not experienced the disgruntled little woman leaving a service after he has called the congregation to a deepening concern for the great problems of the world (war, poverty, race)? As she comes toward him, she looks like a bull charging toward a red cape and cries out: "Preacher, you just don't give me that good feeling of being in church!"

This type of statement says a great deal about the way she and others view worship. For many the only accurate description of worship

is a "set of feelings." Clyde Reid describes the feelings usually desired when he remarks, "We want to be inspired, to come away with a warm feeling, but we do not want to be disturbed, so subconsciously we structure the service in order to assure safe, predictable results."<sup>1</sup>

The attempt to create certain feelings can be seen at most services. The organ music sets a mood, the choir sets a mood, and the lights set a mood as they are raised and lowered. This setting of mood often becomes absurd. One chapel was built with colored lights to give the minister a more holy, healthy look. The type of minister that built the chapel needed the lights in order to look good. This, then is an approach to worship which is manipulative in regard to feelings.

I will deal with five notable aspects of this perversion which are nevertheless desired by many worshippers. In each case these involve what might in some forms be a desirable aspect, but which becomes perverse when given an exaggerated priority.

1) First, many would like to experience the feeling of aloneness with God. Some worshippers would like their worship service to be, in fact, a closed communion service between themselves and God. There is a desire to "go into a closet, close the door and have private fellowship with their Jesus for a few moments."

This understanding has been most apparent on two occasions in my recent experiences. One Sunday during the observance of the Lord's Supper, I suggested to the congregation that each should serve his

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<sup>1</sup> Clyde Reid, *The God-Evaders* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 54.



neighbor the sacraments and share with him a Christian greeting--if no more than just to say, "This is the body of Christ for you." After the service several remarked that they felt as if they had missed communion that Sunday, because they had been too involved with others to feel the presence of God. Within their minds, communion meant a private meal with Jesus.

Again, this was brought home to me in a renewal worship experience, which came about because of the arrangement of the worship setting. The pews were arranged so that each person was facing another. This was to give worshippers a feeling of being in fellowship with all present. But one person let me know in no uncertain terms that she could not worship if she looked at another person--she felt that everyone was watching her and that worship was certainly a private experience between her and God. There are certain elements of privatism with God in worship, yet the "corporate service of worship" by its very name is not private but corporate or communal.<sup>2</sup>

2) The second feeling desired which is a perversion is the desire to be fed according to our desires. Rather than coming to give thanks and praise, they come to get some idea (perhaps prejudice) reinforced, or just to receive a certain "holy feeling." Keith Watkins pinpoints this perversion when he speaks of our stylized corporate ritual:

It has become a form of our self-deception, a mask that conceals our pride of race and position, the source of new ways of justifying devotion to our own security. . . . For

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<sup>2</sup>Robert A. Raines, *The Secular Congregation* (New York: Harper

when we spend our time reinforcing our self-esteem and encouraging ourselves to continue what we are doing, but with greater zeal, we are using religion with its power to perpetuate those very traits which religion is supposed to witness against.<sup>3</sup>

Many pew fillers come for the sermon and the sermon alone. If a minister announces there will be no sermon, many will not make the effort to come at all. In fact, Reuel Howe says that fifty per cent of people questioned see the sermon as the most important part of the service and regard the other "acts" as merely a prelude to the sermon. He says "some even admitted to a sense of relief when the 'preliminaries' are out of the way so we can get down to the business of listening to what the preacher has prepared for us."<sup>4</sup>

There are those who want to be sure the sermon reassures them rather than calls them to a new understanding about life. As one articulate black minister looks at the white church and reflects on the fact that many do not like to "hear it like it is," he states:

They are reminiscent of churchgoers who go to church to be made to feel good. They want their anxieties and frustrations soothed; they want to be put at peace. They want to hear about the easy abstractions of goodness and righteousness, sung in heavenly choruses and never told in the language of the street. They don't want to measure themselves against earthly truths.<sup>5</sup>

There is a deep desire to have the good feeling of having our

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& Row, 1968), p. 81.

<sup>3</sup>Keith Watkins, *Liturgies In a Time When Cities Burn* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), p. 24.

<sup>4</sup>Reuel L. Howe, *Partners in Preaching* (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), p. 54.

<sup>5</sup>Sterling Tucker, *Black Reflections on White Power* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 30.

understanding of life reinforced within the service through the sermon. What most like to hear is "God is in His Holy Temple (Heaven)--all is safe--you are safe and blessed for being in the service." When the sermon pushes much deeper and the fact is raised that just being in the service is not an adequate witness for this day, many become upset.

One year during the advent season, I preached a series of sermons dealing with the needs of a crisis world, challenging the congregation not to be caught in the trap of looking only at a pretty creche scene, but rather to see the deep challenge it has to a world full of suffering--starvation, war dead, decay of the inner-city, and suffering of the blacks. Perhaps scenes like this should be placed alongside the creche scene. The creche scene alone is inadequate as a symbol of the Christmas story today. A few days later, the woman who had given the congregation their creche scene, roared into my study with the words: "I just don't feel like I have been in church when you preach--what does Christmas have to do with mission concern? You just don't fill my vessels when you preach." She had not heard what she was listening for, therefore she had not been able to worship!

Again, many feel that the worship service is like an insurance policy--pay now, benefit later. Surely God will repay all of one's efforts of being at the service and of the giving of money, at the end when one is at the funeral parlor. This feeling is based on the scripture; at the end, I'll receive my "crown of life" for all my effort. Others come just to have the good feeling of being there and the reassurance that "if my time comes this week, I'm ready."

We must admit that there are secondary "good feelings" that can come from worship and celebration, but when this is the primary motivation, it is far from the true purpose of Christian worship.

3) Another feeling that many desire is the "good feeling of being with my kind of folks." Particularly is this seen today in the Protestant church, with the masses of the middle class. Gibson Winter says: "the new middle class is the organization class par excellence. It is also the constituency of the new metropolitan Protestantism."<sup>6</sup> Many like to see others who share their values and their way of life, for this frees them from any need to change.

Within most congregations there is a desire by the worshippers to feel the most comfortable (not just physically comfortable in pews with good air conditioning) with the least possible threat. For many, the church is the last fortress of refuge to flee to, from the stresses and strains of the world. Being confronted by people who have a different political or economic persuasion is anything but desired. What, in fact, is desired is to live in a WASP ghetto. Thomas Mullen describes it this way:

Thousands of Protestants live in a ghetto. Its walls are high, and they are made of the stuff of culture, custom, race, and class. The people who live in this small world are the WASP--the white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants of the middle class --and they have little contact with those outside their ghetto.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961), p. 57.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas J. Mullen, *The Ghetto of Indifference* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 13.

The way that this feeling is expressed most frequently is in the way great efforts are made to keep out conflict. Much of the time, the Christian gospel is sacrificed to the "god of peace." A new couple came into a small group of young couples one night. Everyone was delighted to have such sharp folks. After a short time, they made several political statements completely opposed to the thinking of the rest of the group. The group was stymied! Should it or should it not confront the new couple?

It is clear that the negative voices within many local congregations control many of the congregation's actions because they are fully aware that no one wants trouble or conflict. So to keep the peace, many well-meaning Christian people ignore the demands of the gospel on their lives. The gospel comes with strong demands on life, yet if carrying out those demands might offend someone, the demands are silenced. No element of the Christian faith is left out of the churches more than the "offense of the gospel" that the Apostle Paul speaks of. One of the main reasons is clearly "to avoid conflict." When a minister or layman threatens the peace, there is a strong desire to get rid of him, even when it is apparent that his confrontation is what the congregation needs. Rather than take seriously those demands from the "outsider" the liberal congregation rids itself of the agitator to keep the peace. James Cone states it very clearly when he says:

The liberal, then, is one who sees 'both sides' of the issue and shies away from 'extremism' in any form. He wants to change the heart of the racist without conflict. Therefore, when he sees blacks engaging in civil disobedience and demanding 'Freedom Now,' he is disturbed. Black people know

who the enemy is, and they are forcing the liberal to take sides. But the liberal wants to be a friend, that is, enjoy the rights and privileges pertaining to whiteness and also work for the 'Negro.' *He wants change without risk, victory without blood.*<sup>8</sup>

Within so many worship services, the desire to have "my kind" preserves the peace and the good feeling that "I'm right and I need not make any changes."

This type of peace worship is perverse in the sense that peace is the goal rather than the celebration of God's activity. Elizabeth O'Connor lifts up the perversion as she says: "Peace is not the object of Christian fellowship, though we have thought it was and have maintained 'good' relationships at the terrible expense of not being real with each other."<sup>9</sup> Likewise, the keeping of the peace by staying in "my ghetto" leads to prejudice. As Gordon Allport puts it: "Belonging to a church because it is a safe, powerful, superior in group is likely to be a mark of an authoritarian character and to be linked with prejudice."<sup>10</sup>

4) Another prominent perversion of worship found today is escapism, which generally centers in nostalgia. Many parts of the service, from the arrangement of the building, to the hymns sung, to the order of worship, to the language used, reflect this.

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<sup>8</sup>James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), p. 27.

<sup>9</sup>Elizabeth O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 26.

<sup>10</sup>Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1958), p. 422.

The very architecture of most church buildings resembles great fortresses or forts--much like the fortresses of the middle ages or the forts in the early days of America--places to get away and to feel safe from the world "out there." In fact, a popular song in youth camp a few years back was "A Mighty Fortress is Our Church" as a satire on the church of today. Hans-Ruedi Weber carried this analogy a bit further when he said "evangelism is a sort of Indian raid into enemy territory where the raiders collect scalps and quickly retreat to safety."<sup>11</sup>

When a worshipper enters the archaic sanctuary, he enters a different world--a world with different songs, words, liturgies, and the acts of another generation. He leaves the complexities of the twentieth century world to find relaxation. Pierre Berton puts it this way: "A large percentage, when they enter its portals, check an important part of their lives in the cloakroom."<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting to see the many manifestations of escapism, for example in language. Why is it that we regularly say, "he goes to town," yet on Sunday we hear, "he goeth upth to the towneth"? Why is there a different sound to the music--just turning the dial of the radio on Sunday and getting some of the music is like listening to a different period of history. Trying to get twentieth century music on a Sunday morning is all but impossible. Why are the music and words

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<sup>11</sup>Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Salty Christians* (New York: Seabury Press, 1965), p. 11.

<sup>12</sup>Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965), p. 37.

of 1970 not appropriate in the church of 1970? How much harder it would be to escape if the contemporary world were brought into the sanctuary!

An example of escapism is a letter written to a church in Oklahoma by a well-intentioned layman. The letter is as follows:

His heart wasn't in it when he walked into the church that Sunday morning. He was greeted at the door and received the church bulletin. Seated in the pew, he felt the tensions of the week still with him. His work hadn't gone as well as he would have wished; there were still conflicts on the job and he thought his wife hadn't been quite as sympathetic as she might have been--the children hadn't been altogether cooperative--why couldn't they try a bit harder? But now there was the quiet of the sanctuary--music from the patient organ smoothed footsteps and whispering voices of worshippers who were being seated in favorite places. Morning lights came in--mingled hues through colored glass windows and our harried friend breathed a bit deeper and shifted into a more relaxed position. . . . A sense of comfort quieted his anxieties as he bowed his head in prayer. . . . Hadn't his Lord lived a life full of pressures and known every human conflict? . . . Was this person you or are you still dealing with the pressure of life on your own? It is easier when you have the help of an expert in the field of pressure.<sup>13</sup>

To anyone who reads parish papers this letter is not unusual, yet it does show a basic purpose of worship to be escapism. If escapism is the primary function, the worshipper misses out on the significance of the total service.

As William Holmes observes:

If one of the frequently held concepts of corporate worship is 'a gathering of Christians who *draw apart from the world* to worship God,' then this definition is more than a *non-sequitur*; it is a gross distraction that diverts the man of faith from where the God in Jesus Christ is waiting to be found.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Pawhuska *Oklahoma Christian*, CCLXI:150.

<sup>14</sup> William A. Holmes, *Tomorrow's Church* (Nashville: Abingdon



5) Another perversion is to get a good patriotic feeling from worship. Bryan Wilson, a British sociologist, in analyzing the American and British religious scenes observes that the American church is in a much more advantageous position because of the sense of value placed on church membership. He says: "The evidence of being a complete American has been provided by commitment to a religious belief and to a religious organization."<sup>15</sup>

Many old evangelists have benefited from and gotten many people "to worship" with the statements: "How would you like to live in a town without a church?"; or to a right-wing patriot, "Don't forget our country was founded on Christian ideals, so you won't let your country down and not be in church Sunday!" Church attendance to be a "loyal American" is nation worship rather than the worship of God.

#### WORSHIP AS A RITUAL OF SEPARATION

For many, worship can only be done in one form, the one I grew up with; or done in one place, my church building; or done with one purpose in mind, to win converts. For these worshippers, rather than lengthening perspective about God and His creation, the worship service is a ritual that separates them from others.

1) Often, people feel that worship can only be done in churches of their particular denomination, with their particular style of

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Press, 1968), p. 73.

<sup>15</sup>Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1966), p. 113.

service. Lyle Schaller, a church planner and researcher, tells us it is a myth that a large percentage of people shift from denomination to denomination. "In a survey originally made in 1952 and repeated 1965, eight out of ten people said they were members of the same denomination in which they grew up."<sup>16</sup> This can become so important that worship in another denomination becomes repulsive. I remember when I was a child, while on vacation, my family was visiting some friends of another denomination. During the service, a child was baptized in a way that was foreign to our adult immersion, and my family felt that it was strange that some could call this baptism or worship.

Another example of this feeling occurs when some attend a differing form of the observance of the Lord's Supper. When a Disciple attends a service of worship without communion, he feels that something very important is missing. When an Episcopalian attends a very informal Baptist communion service, he may feel frustrated.

For many years, denominationalism has been encouraged by denominational leaders who have been convinced that one of "our" churches should be in each community and suburb in America. This attitude has separated denomination from denomination and Christian from Christian, and has put the denomination up as a "god."

Closely related is the form of the service being held. Specifically, I have in mind the traditional service versus the experimental form. Today with the advent of many new experimental forms of worship,

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<sup>16</sup>Lyle E. Schaller, *The Impact of the Future* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), p. 243.

many church members are being threatened. In an inner-city congregation where I served as associate minister for a time, it was decided by the ministerial staff that we should have different types of services to meet the needs of the great extremes in the congregation. The congregation had its formal 11:00 o'clock service and a quiet meditative chapel service on Sunday mornings. I set out to develop a service for Thursday evening. The service was to meet two needs--a mid-week service for those unable to attend on Sundays and also an experimental service as an attempt to meet the needs of the youth in the area. (The service is dealt with in a later chapter.) With this type of understanding we proceeded with the service.

Immediately there was an uproar about the new service! The benches in the chapel had been moved to face each other--the music was contemporary--the observance of the Lord's Supper was most unconventional, using bread and water. Each person was encouraged to offer up a prayer (which at times were also unconventional). The service was under attack from much of the leadership. Many who opposed it never attended or participated to see what it was like. They understandably felt that "this type of thing is not in the best interests of our church."

The service was successful in providing a structure of worship for inner-city youth, but the church leadership could not see it as worship, for it did not fit the formal style which they were used to. The old style had become "god" to them.

2) Another prominent perversion is the separation caused by

church buildings. When honesty prevails and a group is asked their first image when the word church is mentioned, most likely the first response will be the large Gothic stone building at the corner of Elm and Main Street. Some are so tied to their building that if the building were to go there would be nothing left. In one midwestern city, a large downtown church building was condemned so the congregation relocated a few blocks away in their new building. Several of the old-timers quit the church, saying, "our old building is the church, if we can't have it, we don't have a church. The new building isn't our church." It is a positive sign to see the big church building boom coming to an end and to see resolutions being accepted to curtail church building in favor of money going to the needy of the world.

It has amazed me that ministers are so puzzled about congregations' sense of values in keeping things for themselves, when in their deeds they act in the same way. One large prestigious church minister preached a series of sermons on the "inner-city needs" to meet the demands of the denomination's urban crisis program. Members of the congregation subscribed a modest sum which had been asked and everyone seemed pleased that they had met the need. Shortly thereafter, an undesigned gift of \$10,000 was received by the church but when a couple of alert laymen suggested the money be used for the "inner-city crisis," the minister was most defensive, saying, "We need this money to repave our parking lot (which was actually in good repair) and to put up new drapes in the sanctuary. We have already done our part in the crisis." The board readily accepted the minister's suggestion to

keep the money for their own use.

When in congregation after congregation we see such leadership, we may well stop wondering why the world takes the words coming from the pulpit so lightly. It is clear that the world is more concerned with what the church does, rather than what the church says. It is no wonder that youth question a church when the board will readily spend \$300 to shine the offering plates, yet will reluctantly give \$100 for the summer youth program, with the reason "What do kids give to the church?"

3) Another way that a service may separate people is when it is basically an evangelistic service. This is not the case in "high" or formal services, yet in many free churches, worship actually can become such an event.

Several years ago, a church across from the one in which I was serving, invited our congregation over for a Sunday evening worship service. At the close of the service, an "altar call" was given. When nothing happened (which probably wasn't too unusual), the minister made the statement, "Would every man who considers himself a Christian come forward and dedicate himself." The men from our church were stymied and felt separated from many of their friends who went to the other church. Evangelistic opportunism creates great separation in services.

For some to worship means to save people. This was clear to me while serving a church in rural Oklahoma, as a seminary student. The church had invited a noted "evangelist" to preach for a week. At the time I was about to embark on my first full-time pastorate, with a

great desire to communicate with all the people, but due to the architecture of the building (the choir was behind the pulpit), I told him this was going to be difficult. Finally after discussing the problem, he tried to reassure me with the words: "Don't worry about the choir, you don't have to preach to them; they are already saved anyway." With this great pronouncement the conversation came to a close, but not my desire to be in dialogue with the choir in that church.

When a worshipper sees the service primarily as an evangelistic opportunity, feeling it is only for the "unconverted," he never enters into the service in a meaningful way.

4) Another perversion which has occurred is the drift toward professionalism. There is the tendency to hire the "pros" (minister, choir director, and perhaps the choir) to do the worshipping for everyone so that the congregation can become observers rather than participants.

Good choirs can be an asset to a worship service, yet for many, a good choir means that the person in the pew doesn't have to sing.

Clyde Reid notes this when he says:

Note the singing of the average congregation. As a rule, it is pathetically weak. Exhortations by the minister that Christians ought to sing out with enthusiasm rarely have any effect on this condition; they often make things worse. . . . the person who sings lustily out feels conspicuous in such a church, as though he were a traitor to the group.<sup>17</sup>

Another type of professionalism occurs when the worshippers hired the "preacher" to proclaim or tell what the "good news" means, and they are

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<sup>17</sup>Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

free to escape from real involvement in the worship service.

Some become worshippers of a particular minister and their entire faith is wrapped up in him. Let him leave and they can no longer worship effectively. This attitude shows the type of separation that can come when worship is done by the professional rather than the community of worshippers.

### THE BASIC PERVERSION

The basic perversion of all the perversions I have mentioned is the fact that they become "gods" and people worship their gods rather than God. When I speak of a "god" I am broadly defining it as H. R. Niebuhr does, as "the object of human faith in life's worthwhileness,"<sup>18</sup> and as Tom Oden does, as "a value enthroned, a loyalty which one cannot do without, that upon which a man counts to render his life meaningful."<sup>19</sup>

It is easy to illustrate this in the various perversions. For example, when a congregation is loyal to keeping the peace, rather than the demands of the gospel, "peace" has become the object of human faith, rather than God. This can be seen when the denomination, the forms of service, the minister, the nation, the building, nostalgia, or evangelism is central to worship. When any of these are central they are "gods."

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<sup>18</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 119.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas C. Oden, *The Structures of Awareness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), p. 236.

The tragedy is "that none of these values or centers of value exists universally, or can be objects of universal faith. None of them can guarantee meaning to our life in the world save for a time. . . . all the beings on which we relied to save us from worthlessness are doomed to pass,"<sup>20</sup> as Niebuhr points out.

God is, in fact, the slayer of all our lesser values, calling us to put them in their rightful place and we find that the slayer of our values is the giver of our lives and our ultimate friend. It is this friend that we worship and call "GOD." As Oden speaks of the church, he says:

This curious community of men, spanning history almost from its remotest beginning to the present, have come to put their final reliance, not in limited values that pass away, but precisely in the opponent of our values, the antagonist of our gods . . . . That which was once considered threatening and unchallengeable is now welcomed as less than finally threatening. We are called to value all of life anew in relation to the ground, giver, and judge of value.<sup>21</sup>

It is out of this type of happening in our lives, that the church needs to celebrate, worship, and praise God. Our perversions may have value, but none are ultimate! It is the ultimate that gives nations, buildings, and ministers, value. Out of thanksgiving for the giving of values, we worship the giver--GOD. Niebuhr sums it up this way: "It does not, therefore, afford ground for boasting but only simple thanksgiving."<sup>22</sup> So we join in thanksgiving, remembering God's activities in our lives.

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<sup>20</sup>Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, pp. 120, 122.

<sup>21</sup>Oden, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-241.      <sup>22</sup>Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p. 126.



## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENT DAY PERVERSIONS OF SOCIAL ACTION

One of the great ironies of the life of the twentieth century church is its controversy over social involvement for mankind. From the beginning, the church has reached out to meet various needs. Today, with the great polarization of understandings, there is a vast difference in interpretation of the meaning of social action.

For the social activist it means to be involved in behalf of the economic and political needs of mankind. For the institutionalist, it means only bringing mankind into the church and dealing with men's souls.

In the century all congregations have participated in worship activity, yet some would estimate that as many as fifty or sixty per cent of the local congregations of our time have never involved themselves outside of the congregation for social witness. Fifty per cent of Protestants feel that "clergy should stick to religion and not concern themselves with social, economic, and political questions."<sup>1</sup> Only twenty-seven per cent of the Protestants of our nation felt that the prominent social actionist Martin Luther King, Jr., was making Christianity relevant and meaningful in our day.<sup>2</sup>

With such strong feelings it has been hard for the institutional church to move outside of itself for the world. It is difficult to be

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<sup>1</sup>Jeffrey K. Hadden, *The Gathering Storm in the Churches* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969), p. 134.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 137.

critical of the attempts which have been made, yet to be honest the institutional church has generally failed to be truly socially relevant and helpful to the world.

Most of the action projects of the church have been done by members individually motivated out of concern for themselves and for their institutions rather than by those engaged in corporate activity for mankind. A great sickness has been the individualism that has continued to be perpetuated in projects rather than in corporate, family concern.

#### TO BENEFIT MYSELF

So many of the activities of the church are given wayside pulpit capital letter billing as ways to be of service to mankind, yet the reason many participate is not primarily to serve mankind, but for the "good feeling" they receive.

The "good feeling" and feelings of personal worth are important for the people of God, as with all mankind, yet it should be a by-product rather than the central motivation. Too often the basic motivation for involvement is the subjective feelings that will be received. I would mention at least three ways people are motivated to action out of personal feelings.

First, is the "good feeling," "I have done my part or given my fair share." This is a rather egocentric "look what I have done" attitude.

Many white churchmen have been very proud of the fact that they

have helped ghetto children. A large bourgeois church in Los Angeles had a discussion group talk about the problems of the Watts area. Out of their discussion it was decided to take baseballs and bats to a youth center there. After the press had taken the pictures of this group of "greatly concerned" people, they returned home to boast for years of their concern. They had done their part and felt good about it.

When action is out of self-concern or for the purpose of feeling good, it fails at its basic task of helping mankind. Harvey Cox points out that such attempts at help for the inner-city ghetto have added up "to a flimsy and even self-deluding series of efforts . . . largely ill-conceived and patronizing." He illustrates this with the summer youth work camps:

The psychology of the situation is so unfavorable that, on balance, work camps probably do more harm than good. The visitors play the role of those who bring health and soundness to an area of decay and deterioration. . . . Inner-city people are expected to be grateful for the services rendered.<sup>3</sup>

This type of action is harmful both for the recipient and the social agent. The one receiving the "helping hand" is often psychologically dehumanized, and for the giver of such help the good feeling is based on theological "works righteousness."

Many blacks are becoming clear and articulate about their feelings of being dehumanized or just plain "used." Sterling Tucker of the Urban League of Washington, D.C. puts the feeling in these words:

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<sup>3</sup>Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 139-140.

The business executives, in their exuberance and desire to salve troubled consciences, point to improved opportunities for blacks in business and industry without acknowledging, indeed, without even seeing, that what they point to as program is tokenism. We are hired today, not because we now have something to offer which we did not have yesterday, but because the company decided, for whatever reason, that the pattern of black and white had to be changed, restructured, redesigned. By bringing a few blacks in, a company modifies somewhat a condition that exists; it does not necessarily change its attitude or up-end an unjust condition. The same prejudice may exist, the same discriminatory practices may remain in evidence. And the act of opening the door just slightly and closing it quickly to safeguard against a stampede perpetuates tokenism and tokenism is a blatant acknowledgement of racism.<sup>4</sup>

Tokenism, rather than helping, alienates the black man from his God-given relationship in the scope of human existence. Tokenism is one sickness within the church.

Besides the negative feelings produced in the black man, such programs can become nothing more than work's righteousness. "Do a good turn for the black man, while I, the white man, continue to live my enjoyable white existence and reap the rewards of knowing my goodness before God," is the way many whites respond. This attitude is resented by the blacks, as Tucker tells the story of one white business executive:

A vice-president of a major oil company addressed a seminar that I attended, and he talked proudly of the work he did in his church group, mainly during the summer when he and his friends took black youngsters from Harlem each Saturday and brought them out to a fashionable section of Westchester to picnic on private grounds and to swim in private pools. "Isn't it a fine program we have put into operation?" he queried. "Yes, I suppose so," was my reply, "but everyone knew that when the sun went down, the busses return those children to Harlem."

America has a big heart for charity, but no heart for change.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Sterling Tucker, *Black Reflections on White Power* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 23.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 130.

Tokenism can be seen in church membership. Much like the business that hires a few blacks to give a good appearance, some congregations allow one or two quiet reserved blacks as members to give the appearance of inclusiveness.

A distinction needs to be made between social action and service projects. Many of the activities we term social action fit better under the title, "service projects." The illustrations of the giving of baseball equipment to Watts and the summer camp for the Harlem children would be service projects rather than social action. Service projects treat symptoms of diseases, while social action treats the causes of the symptoms so that future service projects would be unnecessary. Social action is "preventive medicine." Service is generally done for the individual or family after a tragedy; action is for the benefit of, before the tragedy occurs.

Another illustration of the difference between service projects and social action is within a congregation I served in a rural area. In three years, three families within the congregation had their homes destroyed by fire. Each time the church responded with food, clothing, furniture, etc.(service projects). Social action by the congregation would have been to put pressure on the city leadership to provide better fire fighting equipment and training so when the next house caught fire, the fire department could control it before it was destroyed.

Personal service projects are more likely to be done by a congregation than is social action because members derive a better personal

satisfaction and subjective feeling from the response of those with whom they work.

Others take pride in what they have done by the hiring of personnel to do what they feel is important but would rather not do themselves. One layman once told me, "I know this work is important, but I'll do my job and pay someone to do my part." Now it is nice to have money for inner-city ghetto projects, but this can be a real escape from involvement corporately and individually. Churches hire administrators and executives who in fact are doing the job of the laity which shows a lack of concern for people and perpetuates the sickness of uninvolvement.

At the other extreme are those so involved in social action that they lose sight of everything else. They may become domineering and overaggressive in the pursuit of their goals, assuming that their way is the only way. This happens sometimes with people who attend weekend courses of the Ecumenical Institute. Ecumenical Institute training is an excellent introduction to theology and change in a church, but there seems to be a tendency of those within it to see its methods as the only approach.

There is the risk in social action of losing sight of the individual and his problem, the risk of becoming farsighted and of losing vision for those close at hand. James Dittes, a psychologist puts it this way:

Perhaps all intensely but narrowly motivated persons in the church, those who find special ministries with minorities of especially responsive people, run the risk of becoming the

beatniks of the church, protesting against irrelevance and disengagement by disengaging themselves still more into isolated individualistic 'Greenwich Villages.' Perhaps worse than the 'suburban captivity' of the churches is their captivity in 'the village.' The throb of campus, counseling center, inner city, hospital, or other isolated village--including, one must add, a seminary faculty--is sometimes mistaken for the essential heartbeat of contemporary life. But, just as the pulse is best felt in the extremities after it has pushed its way through much tissue, so is the genuinely living heartbeat of our time that which pushes life through the sometimes flabby, sometimes muscular tissues of involvement in the major roles of life: in vocation, in family, and in widening concentric circles of community.<sup>6</sup>

Another possible hazard for one who feels that all the answers are in social action is a failure to nourish the inner resources necessary to develop himself for effective leadership. Many social action groups have acted with little in-depth understanding or grounding in their mission.

George Webber, a great pioneer of inner-city church renewal points out that after several years of great social activity, the parish had to return to some solid biblical study to receive direction to continue their work and to develop their priorities. He felt that they had to be driven back to first things in their program in Harlem.<sup>7</sup>

As one feels he has it wrapped up in action alone and feels satisfied with it, a part of his life just does not grow. Anyone who has known the joy of working and planning strategies for social action can profit by the experiences of the Church of the Savior in Washington

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<sup>6</sup>James E. Dittes, *The Church In The Way* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup>George W. Webber, *The Congregation in Mission* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 75.

D.C. Elizabeth O'Connor talks about the social actionist as she says:

They respond to externals only, since their attention is outward. They have many answers. When they do ask questions they ask them of others but never themselves. There is a sameness about those in the crowd . . . They do not receive anything into themselves; things happen to them, but never in them. Their lives are rich in outer events, and poor in inner ones. They are the impoverished who are not included in any poverty program. They are the dead who do not know they sleep.<sup>8</sup>

For this type of person, social action is an escape from deep introspection while at the same time the person can have the good feeling of being where the action is. This route leads to a dead end since it takes but a short time to go stale from the lack of study and reflection. Even Jesus had to go into the hills for prayerful reflection on his ministry. Without this, a person involved loses sight of his goal and purpose for being in the world.

It is clear that social action can be done out of individualistic motives as much as can worship. When one acts to "feel good," to earn merits with God or man, to escape from his own needs or those around him, his motivation is far from the example of the primitive church.

#### TO BENEFIT THE INSTITUTION

Another way in which social action can become perverted is when it is done out of the motivation of doing it for my church or to save my church. For some congregations today, social action is a way of saving itself as an institution. For example, I heard a denominational

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 5.



executive speaking about a "ghetto project." His main pitch seemed to be, "even if you don't like the project, or want to participate, you better help them before they burn you." The pressure here is to save the institution and the motivation at this point is one of fear.

But even more prevalent in saving a sinking institution is the question asked of various projects: "What will it do for us?" I visited with a very well-read and committed laywoman and she told me about a project that her inner-city congregation had sponsored for the youth in the area around the church. The church had excellent recreational facilities and these were opened to the youth. A good director took charge, and the project was a great success with the youth, many of whom had no tie with any church. Yet after three or four years the board decided to discontinue the program since very few of their own youth (from the suburbs) were active in the program, it did not seem to be producing any new church members, and it added expense to the church budget for utilities and building upkeep. The woman concluded by saying, "It would have been a success and we would have all backed it, if it would have only shown some results (new members for the congregation), but since it was just a place for the rough neighborhood kids to meet and have fun and was not bringing them into the church, we just couldn't continue the program."

Here is an example of a program that began with good social action intentions but ended in selfish motivation. A book was written some time ago by a group of evangelical churchmen and in one article the writer told of the great opportunities and benefits of the day-care

nurseries in churches. Very logically he points out that churches have facilities for such programs and it takes little additional equipment, and then he points out: "One advantage, of course, is that such programs are likely to draw non-church people into the sphere of influence of the church, if the program is handled adequately."<sup>9</sup>

When programs are started or killed solely because of what they do in terms of building up the attendance or membership of the institutional church, they cannot in reality be termed social action, but rather termed evangelism. Even when using the term evangelism, the motivation is perverted since it is self-interest.

Some projects that are termed social action in reality fit more under the heading of "social events" of the church rather than of "social action." These events keep the church going in a social way for itself rather than in the deeper concerns of life. This may be seen in women's groups of the church. One woman looks with a critical eye at what is actually happening when she says:

Many view women's groups with a caricaturist's eye. There Helen Hokinson-like, big-bosomed and well meaning matriarchs invite men to their podium 'to summarize the world situation, after which tea and cookies will be served.'

Others relate women's groups to the society section. The First Church Rummage Sale is 'covered' by at least an assistant editor of the Women's Sections of our metropolitan dailies. Pictures show long lines of people converging on the massive church structure to purchase discarded lamp shades and minks, tablecloths and earrings, the proceeds of which go to support

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<sup>9</sup>David McKenna, *The Urban Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), p. 105.

a home missions program. In the remaining rural areas of our country, church sponsored bake sales, white elephants, and the making and selling of recipe calendars are reported under Social News.<sup>10</sup>

Events like these are important socially for the church, but the basic motivation seems more for the benefit of the group or church than for mankind. Again, one cannot but question the deep underlying motivation for action, especially when it is compared to the dynamic primitive church.

A third institutional problem is that discussion of social problems remains just that, discussion, and seldom moves into action. Many sermons lift up great idealistic theories concerning brotherhood, peace, and love but give no specific directions for action for the layman who is ready to act. Many ministers have learned that it is proper to at least give lip service to social issues, but safe to remain unspecific in example and suggestions for action. Also it is hard to give concrete instructions so social action stops with the great idea.

Orlando Tibbetts lifts the problem of vague generalities up as one of the great problems in the church today.

One of the great weaknesses of the church is to talk in general about mission but not to focus the concern on specific targets. Many years ago, when an internationally famous Boston preacher was at the height of his popularity, a newspaper reporter asked a man on the street what he thought of him. The response was, 'He thinks he loves everyone in general but no one in particular.' The church falls into the trap of talking about its general mission goals without zeroing in on specially designated targets.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Peggy Way, "Women in the Church: Comic Strip, Society Section or Front Page?" in Stephen Rose (ed.) *Who's Killing the Church?* (New York: Association Press, 1966), p. 30.

<sup>11</sup>Orlando L. Tibbetts, *The Reconciling Community* (Valley Forge:

Discussion of vital issues makes the institutional church look as if its concerns are in the right place, while at the same time, it keeps itself out of involvement and out of danger. One of the best criteria to judge whether a congregation means business about community concerns is not the sermon, but the budget or the use of its money.

Talk in general is safe and appeasing to the conscience and serves to keep the unconcerned congregation under an illusion of being socially concerned. Talk is necessary, yet when it fails to lead to meaningful involvement, it would seem that the motivation is basically a desire for the institution to "look good" in a time when social action talk is in vogue.

PART III

THE FUTURE HOPE

## CHAPTER V

### THE RESURRECTION OF THE HOUSE CHURCH

How does the good news of Jesus Christ stay alive in any given period of history? It must be spoken by prophets and revolutionaries, by dreamers and servants. Where are those prophets today?

The church as we know it is failing. The life giving Word, rather than giving freedom and life, has been perverted, pushing its members into conformity rather than creativity. Harvey Cox lifts this up when he says of the church:

It has emptied the gestures of celebration until they have become barren and joyless. It has discouraged radical fantasy as a possible threat to its hard-won place in Caesar's society. It cannot take the risk of putting its ultimate loyalty in the 'world to come,' . . . because it has too deep a stake in the world of yesterday and today.<sup>1</sup>

### THE FAILURE OF RENEWAL

The church is failing. Renewal is helping to keep some important aspects alive, but renewal only touches special areas and not the deep sickness. If the church remains as it is today, it will continue to fail to meet the great demands of the future. It will fail because as Harvey Cox points out:

The church is not the church. That is, what we now call 'churches' have departed so markedly from their vocation as agents and advocates of Christian faith that only a residue

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<sup>1</sup>Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 95.

of that historic calling remains. Dim echoes of it are still heard in its preaching and pale shadows of it appear in its liturgy. But the substance has been thinned and the spirit dulled.<sup>2</sup>

For too long we have dealt with church renewal, or "gimmick" programs in an attempt to make the church relevant. We have concentrated on renewing each section of the church, while the world burns. The young ask today, "If we ever get the church renewed, will there be a world to minister to? Will it be too late?" Finally the time has arrived when we must move beyond church renewal. The term renewal has become so diluted that it is irrelevant. The task of the People of God is world renewal or world recreation, rather than church renewal.

When people join together out of a radical concern and love for mankind and the world, once again the Church of God will be in existence. It will not be a fantasy or a dream. When this happens, Harvey Cox says we might even detect some life beneath the ashes, with a small flame breaking through.<sup>3</sup> The shape of the new church is still a fantasy, but some clues are beginning to appear. Groups are forming together out of concern for the world; free groups of men, women, and youth, building community out of a Christian concern, seeking to be in relationship to each other and taking a new stance of love for the world. Many of these are meeting in homes, separate from a local congregation. They are not church renewal groups, but world minded people; the type who witnessed in the first century, known as the church. In my fantasy, the new church I see is the House Church.

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<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

## THE HOUSE CHURCH IN REALITY

The House Church, with its present emphasis upon bringing a new vitality to the "Word of God," began in Europe, especially in England, less than twenty-five years ago.<sup>4</sup> Bishop John A. T. Robinson says of the movement today: "I believe this development of the church in the house to be the single most important new thing that is happening in the Church of England today."<sup>5</sup>

From my own experience as founding minister of a House Church, the sickness and perversion can be dealt with through this approach more rapidly than any other method. The basic reason is that the people involved recognize that newness of life is essential and they are there to create meaningful forms for the church in the seventies. Within the present established institutional church, with its many perversions of Christianity, there is great resistance to change or growth. The House Church does not have to point out perversions, deal with them, and bring about slow orderly change. It is at the point of creating meaningful forms now! This is not to imply that the House Church cuts its ties with history and tradition. On the contrary, it seeks to look deeply into tradition to find how it is meaningful to the present age.

Bishop Robinson points out that many misunderstand the House

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<sup>4</sup>Rüdiger Reitz, *The Church in Experiment* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), p. 39.

<sup>5</sup>John A. T. Robinson, *On Being the Church in the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 95.



Church, since they see it as a temporary makeshift arrangement, created to serve as a mission until a parish church can be organized. Some see the House Church as an evangelistic weapon for reaching those people not yet ready to accept the parish church; a half-way house for the semi-converted. These ad hoc understandings miss the point of the New Testament. The House Church had great theological significance in the life of the primitive church. When Paul wrote: "Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord"; (I Corinthians 16:19) or "Greet Prisca and Aquila . . . and the church in their house"; (Romans 16:3, 5) or "give my greetings to the brethren at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house" (Colossians 4:15). Paul was not talking to groups where churches had not developed (e.g., Rome) or to people acting as evangelists only.<sup>6</sup> These were parish churches--they were the church!

The House Church movement today is composed of people who desire to take the task of the church in the twentieth century with radical seriousness; they are in fact the true revolutionaries of our day. Walter Starcke speaks of the student revolution, but the words he uses apply to the type of person in the House Church movement.

Then I realized that the young are bent on bringing into reality the world we taught them it was possible to have. They actually believed the American dream we talk about, only they see no reason why it can't be a world dream for everyone, no matter what sex or color. . . . They are going to do what we dreamed of but failed to believe was really possible.

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<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 84.

. . . Man sees no reason to continue putting up with sickness. He's going to rebel and rebel until the cause of revolution is eliminated.<sup>7</sup>

The House Church member takes the Christian dream seriously and is ready to bring it about.

Reformers for centuries have felt the House Church or cell group is vital. Martin Luther favored a home gathering: "Those who seriously want to be Christians and to confess the gospel in deed and word ought to write themselves in by name and perhaps *gather by themselves in a home for prayer, Scripture reading, Baptism, Holy Communion, and other Christian exercises.*"<sup>8</sup> In a similar fashion, John Wesley insisted upon his followers being in class meetings (cell groups).

Today men like Bishop Robinson are calling for Christians to form into cells within the parish church, much like parishes are cells in the diocese. He sees the cell as a church in miniature, worshipping together. The House Church is the cell that feeds new life into the parish church.

At this point I am convinced that the Bishop has betrayed one of his own understandings, in seeing the House Church as a tool for the parish. For the House Church to be a living autonomous church, it must be free of the parish church or it can fall into the trap of serving the institution rather than the world. That is to say, it can end up

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<sup>7</sup>Walter Starcke, *The Ultimate Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 16-17.

<sup>8</sup>J. C. Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 93, quoting Martin Luther, "Preface to the German Mass."

as an aid in education for the parish or an aid for fellowship, or an aid in worship, or as a tool for mission. If the House Church is a church in microcosm it does all of these and must be free of the parish church.

I am not saying that the House Church should not have connectional ties with other House Churches or perhaps a denomination or even a parish, but rather it must not be a subdivision of a parish. In fact, connectional ties with others are vital if the House Church is to be effective in mission and social witness. Probably the most effective group to make ties with is other House Churches, since they too, would have the freedom to act without relying upon other responsibilities. House Church clusters could be the most effective units.

Another basic problem with the strict parish tie is that for those ready to pick up the task of the church, this tie could produce barriers. When there are no denominational ties, it gives those with varied church backgrounds more freedom to be and to grow. Denominational barriers are not felt, for the group is more concerned with being the "Body of Christ," and in being a new community for worship and witness today than in arguing past history of differences.

The most basic criticism of the House Church and one that must be dealt with here, is that the House Church has no tie to historic Christianity. Therefore House Church members may experiment without any sense of responsibility to the greater or historic church.

To perpetuate historical tradition, the denominations must train and ordain men to the leadership of House Churches as a special form

of ministry. One of the great ties to historic Christianity has been ordination. With an ordained minister, the House Church would not fall outside of the historic church, but would be in a direct relationship. In this way, the House Church could operate autonomously, yet responsibly in the historic tradition of Christianity.

### THE ADVANTAGES OF THE HOUSE CHURCH

Several advantages of the House Church make it an effective tool of the 1970's in serving society on behalf of God.

1. The personal closeness that is engendered in the House Church is profoundly beneficial. Members have an opportunity to become, in the deep sense, a special community of people.

There is a greater opportunity to learn what it means to be the church family. When it is a cell of a parish, the group can rely upon leadership resources and money from the parish, but it is tied and not absolutely free to be itself. When a small group is autonomous, it must rely upon itself. The members rely upon each other. When one person acts irresponsibly, the whole group suffers.

Likewise, the group can call each member to responsibility, as members of a family. Members see themselves as the Body of Christ. As Bishop Robinson puts it, people are not going to church; they are the church, and there is no way to evade the person next to them.<sup>9</sup> Each person is responsible to the other and to the body.

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<sup>9</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

Our House Church in Los Angeles sees itself as a family unit. We have studied the Church of the Savior closely and can understand what Elizabeth O'Connor means, when she speaks of their community:

We were never able to conclude that we could have a community in Christ by signing our names in a book, subscribing to the budget, and coming to church on Sundays. Over the years church has come to mean to us that special community in which there is accountability. It is possible to be in many kinds of relationship with the church, and this is all right, if it is not confirmed as discipleship. Discipleship involves us in a community of specific and accountable relationships with at least two or three meeting in his Name. It is a community in which strengths are discovered and weaknesses revealed--in which intimacy will be found, and hurt experienced, in which we endure the brother who is antagonistic to our own understanding and values. It is the community in which we are sustained, and it is the community in which we are betrayed. It is the community whose goal is defined by a Life that was for others.<sup>10</sup>

Within our community we open our festivities with the Common Meal, similar to the Agape feast. We share and have the deepest of fellowship and share our lives with each other. At each meeting we celebrate life and share the Eucharist. When I say share, we give to our neighbor the sacrament of the Lord, with our own words of love. We plan our mission, realizing it is only as strong as our oneness and community. We know what it means, to "build up the Body of Christ."

As we live and work as a family, we aid each other in self-sacrificing ways. Even as I write these pages, I am dependent upon two members of our community for help with typing and grammar. But we feel that this is what a family is for. As was true in the primitive church,

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 169.

our concern for each other overflows to the world beyond our micro-church.

Only the House Church can develop such a deep sense of personal care and love, of a people dependent upon each other. Within this type of framework, knowing he is loved and cared for, a person has a greater opportunity "to be free to discover who he is, free to discover who others are, and free to discover who God is."<sup>11</sup>

2. The House Church offers freedom in discovering and developing new forms for the church of the future. Because it is not responsible to a parish church, it is free to experiment, fail, and try again. As I have worked in cell groups of greater parishes, we have had to count the cost, and to act in accordance with what people of the parish, many with different understandings, think, say, and do. This is essential for a cell, both for the purpose of existence and out of love for those who think differently.

The House Church is free of this responsibility. Its responsibility is to be the creative agent in and for the church as a whole. We know that many of the things we do, the established, institutional church cannot do, but some of our experiments will be used effectively in the local parish.

Our community has the great gift to be free to fail, and to try again. At times I feel like a little toy that a member of my family had. It was a little battery operated bulldozer. Turn it on and it

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<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 172. (My use of singular use of the pronoun rather than plural.)

would run until it hit a wall, turn around, back off and go again until it hit another object. We are free to experiment. Or as my friend Clyde Reid puts it, "just play it by ear."

The House Church is free to fantasize about the church of tomorrow and experiment with that fantasy. Harvey Cox feels the future is dependent upon fantasy:

Man's openness to a really new future is dependent on his capacity for fantasy. Fantasy thrives among the dissatisfied. This suggests that insight into the future and willingness to move forward may require an element of alienation from our present society. Could this be why Jesus insisted that only the poor and the disinherited could really grasp the Kingdom of God?<sup>12</sup>

Out of the freedom to try our dreams and fantasies, the church finds hope for the new age. The House Church has that kind of freedom. It was this freedom to experiment and find meaningful forms that gave the early church much of its vitality. The Eucharist and their witness were built around the great hope in the future. The House Church experiences hope for the church as an effective agent of love and reconciliation in the world.

Layman after layman is giving up in the institutional church. Some drop out, some fade, and others just experience guilt over the failure of the church. The institution has lost its vision of creating a world. For laity and clergy alike, so many tears are shed for the dying church, that its vision has become blurred. The House Church as it experiments sees hope and the possibility of creating a new world.

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<sup>12</sup>Cox, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

It takes its creative possibility seriously and lives in a world of expectation.

### POSSIBLE STARTING POINTS

Where does a group start in an experimental ministry like the House Church? This is a basic question in our society, yet in experimentation there is no particular place to start.

One group might begin out of a social action committee of a local congregation, another might begin out of a Bible study or discussion group, another might be started by an interested group of those working at the same plant, or having similar vocational concerns (e.g. doctors, lawyers). A House Church begins when there is a need to be met.

Such a group might start meeting with a common meal and worship. The House Church of Los Angeles felt it necessary to join in the common meal and to celebrate the gift of life we had together. Bishop Robinson concurs that the Eucharist is the starting point for the church and that only here is the Koinonia constituted. Only in the communion does community develop.<sup>13</sup> Within our experiment we felt that our first task was to develop a community. Out of this community we could go forth to witness in the world. The center of our new community has been the Eucharist.

The House Church once again restores the congruency bringing the

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<sup>13</sup> Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 87.



oneness of the various acts together. One of the exciting things concerning the primitive church was the involvement of each member of the community in all aspects of that community life. The House Church brings the sense of community about once more, tying worship, study, and witness together in a meaningful sense.

In the following chapter I will deal first with an approach to worship for the House Church. Then I will discuss the social witness of the community.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE HOUSE CHURCH IN CELEBRATION

As I have developed this paper, thus far I have dealt with worship and action, attempting to show ways in which they were tied together meaningfully in the primitive church. Yet today both are so perverted that they are separated and have little interaction. The need, therefore, is for a celebration which will bring the two together once again.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE "CELEBRATION OF LIFE" SERVICE

From the outset, the House Church of Los Angeles has called its worship experience a "celebration." The word lifts up the feeling that we possess concerning worship. Worship is not a gathering of the downhearted of the world, but of the joyous people who know and experience authentic life--people who rejoice, praising God, and celebrating the "Good News" concerning life.

Our early meetings consisted solely of the common meal and a "Celebration of Life" service. The service which we used was simple. Since the service was a successor to one which some of us had used previously, it would be helpful to know how we came into existence as a House Church.

In the fall of 1968, I joined the staff of a downtown Hollywood church as the associate minister. The senior minister had a denominational office and was gone much of the time, leaving most of the

program planning in my hands. The Hollywood area abounds with youth and a few attended the "rap" sessions provided by the church, but none attended the formal worship on Sunday.

For several years the congregation had discussed providing a midweek worship for the purpose of reaching those unable to attend services on Sunday. Between this desire and a desire to reach the youth of the area, I worked out an experimental service.

As I prepared it, I kept in mind the importance of taking the traditional acts of worship and setting them in a contemporary format, meaningful to Hollywood youth. I tried to find ways to help them express joy, confess sin, feel absolution, and find practical ways to express this in the world. I used three of the four guidelines suggested by Keith Watkins, one of the most authoritative voices today in the Disciples of Christ on the subject of relevant worship. These three guidelines included:

- 1) The first principle is that the service be responsible to the Christian consensus concerning the shape of the liturgy . . . Stripped to the bare minimum, common order consists of three elements--scripture, sermon, and supper.
- 2) A second major principle for guiding free worship is that the service be responsible to the life of our time . . . in prayer, contemporary word, music.
- 3) A fourth general guideline for the ordering of worship in the free tradition is that services should combine variety and repetition, excitement, and sobriety.<sup>1</sup>

Basically, I used the guidelines of Consultation on Church Union

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<sup>1</sup>Keith Watkins, *Liturgies In a Time When Cities Burn* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), pp. 72-85.

to help fit the service into the historic traditions of the church except for the placement of the Eucharist. By putting the Eucharist with the Absolution, I attempted to use it as a symbol of the Grace of God.

The service was world oriented. It had a reading of the day's newspaper, the word from God in modern writings, a proclamation in the form of a popular record, painting or drama, and a sending forth into the world.

The Thursday service was well received by the youth and attendance grew, as it met a real need. Some older members of the congregation were resistant, but did not indicate this to me. Upon returning from a short vacation, I was informed that the type of work that I had done and my emphasis with youth and experimentation had put a block between me and several leaders of the congregation. I left the staff and the Thursday Celebration was done away with.

Several of the leaders of the Celebration wanted to continue it and to develop new missional forms. About five or six adults began to meet together and experiment further with worship. Out of this half-dozen, the House Church of Los Angeles was formed.

The Thursday Celebration was used for a short time, and was then slightly modified into the "Celebration of Life" service. As the community grew, various worship backgrounds were incorporated into the group, including Baptist, Disciple, Methodist, and Roman Catholic.

The basic educational tool we use for a catechism is the Ecumenical Institute's Religious Studies-I course on theological studies.

One must take this basic course to enter fully into our covenantal community.

Because of our tie with the Ecumenical Institute, from time to time we use "The Daily Office" service of Ecumenical Institute as a form of worship. This service is much more formal and traditional than the "Celebration of Life" service, since one had developed from a liturgical church (Ecumenical Institute from Wesley) and one from a free church (Celebration of Life from a Disciples tradition).

Therefore, as we looked for a way of understanding traditional worship, we used the Daily Office as a guide. The Daily Office had been developed by Dean Joseph Matthews of the Ecumenical Institute of Chicago, a Methodist clergyman, who had ties with the Anglican tradition. Our House Church found this background meaningful and relevant. It is an acceptable service for those of a formal tradition and could easily be used by them.

The Daily Office, as a worship celebration could be used as a regular service. As one understands the depth and tradition behind it, it takes on additional meaning.

#### THE ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE UNDERSTANDING OF WORSHIP

Joseph W. Matthews, the founding Dean of the Ecumenical Institute of Chicago, sees the worship of the church as only one area in the church's life which is under "divine assault," but a major one, and one which is, in fact, the beginning of church renewal.<sup>2</sup> It is more difficult to

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<sup>2</sup>This section is based on Joseph W. Matthews, "Common Worship in

reflect and to reevaluate the worship activity than any other area of the church, but it must be dealt with since it is central to its total program. The common worship of the local congregation ties together study, service, and witness and without it those activities lose their vital meaning in understanding the faith and the common loyalty within the community. Worship points to our common loyalty in Jesus Christ, our common witness in the world, and our responsibility to each other.

Worship is at the center of our understanding of the church. In true worship the community comes together to understand itself "before the Word of God in Christ." The hearing of the Word is the reason that the Christian community gathers. This is the center of worship--to receive and to proclaim the good Word.

According to the Ecumenical Institute understanding of worship, the Word is said corporately to another and heard corporately from another. Each person is a priest as he declares the living Word to another. We can hear the Word for ourselves only, but we hear it from another, and another hears it from us.

At the Institute worship is never separated from life or witness. As the Word is heard, the community scatters to witness to it, each in his own way, and in his own situation. After the witness is made, the community gathers again to hear the Word. To be a Christian in the world today is to have "decisive awareness" of God's love which

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the Life of the Church" (Chicago: Ecumenical Institute). Unless otherwise noted, the basic thoughts are those of the Institute through the paper by Matthews.

gives one the possibility of living a life of service.

The central question which must be posed concerning any worship service is, "What is the Body of Christ doing when she gathers to worship?" Those at the Institute remind us that worship is symbolic activity, symbolizing the self-understanding of man before God. They point out that only in the last two hundred years have men been conscious of symbols, and that their worship is an attempt to dramatize, through symbols, the God and Man encounter. Matthews observes that this understanding of worship has three implications:

One is that to worship as a Christian is not to be a spectator watching a drama performed by others, such as the clergy and the choir. It is to be involved as one of the actors. The community as a whole is involved. Functions differ but the play is a unit and there are no star roles.

Secondly, the Christian who goes to worship in search of 'religious feelings' to be experienced or of 'religious ideas' to which he can assent has not yet grasped the meaning of common worship of God. Christian worship is the response of the total man precisely because it involves the core of the self. The question put to the worshiper is not how do you feel or what do you know, but who do you choose to be in the light of God's activity in Christ?

A third implication which has particular significance for the comprehension of the inner meaning of Christian worship is that the God that is worshipped and the self-understanding given in worship determine the basic structure or form of worship. . . . In Christian worship the God in Christ determines the inner structure or the dramatic movement of the service.<sup>3</sup>

Matthews relies heavily on the format of Edward Hobbs, who examined John Wesley's Order for Morning Prayer.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>Edward C. Hobbs, "Rehearsing the Drama of Salvation: John Wesley's Order for Morning Prayer," *Motive*, XVII:8 (May, 1957). *The Wesley Orders of Common Prayer* (Nashville: National Methodist Student Movement, 1957).

The form of the Ecumenical Institute Daily Office is a three-part service suggested by Wesley and Hobbs, consisting of the "confession and pardon," "praise and witness," and "offering and dedication." It is a systematic exhibit of the Christian's relation to God, as understood by the Christian.<sup>5</sup> Or, as Matthews puts it, it is picking up and symbolically acting out "the way life is." Hobbs calls these three symbolic acts "the Service of Confession, the Service of the Word (for the praise and thanksgiving are all in the words of Scripture), and the Service of Offering."<sup>6</sup>

This arrangement is no accident. It intentionally lifts up the relationship of every Christian before God. Hobbs states his understanding of this relationship as follows:

In the midst of my sinful attempts either to go on about my own affairs apart from God or to 'worship' God in my own way, God suddenly confronts me with his Word (which, when written down, we call the Bible--when concrete in events, we call Christ), which is the terrifying announcement that I am a sinner and that I cannot worship God in this condition. In the face of such a revelation, I can do no other (if I am to respond Christianly) than fall on my knees and confess myself to be indeed that which I have shown to be--a sinner before God and man. Without this acknowledgment, I am only an imposter when I try to stand before God and worship him. But for those who confess their sin, he is faithful to forgive. Such forgiveness enables me--nay, commands me--to rise and praise God, to thank him for his innumerable benefits, and to hear with understanding his demands upon me in his Word. But if I confess such faith in such a God, it behooves me to cease my anxious care about my future, about the dangers which I fear might overwhelm me--and to offer all such concerns to him who cares for us, and who has assured us today of his care in all the Scripture we have heard.

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<sup>5</sup>Hobbs, "Rehearsing," p. 29.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*



Tomorrow, of course, I have forgotten that I can trust him, and that he cares for me; I am again attempting to live life on my own terms, attempting to find security in the passing-ness of life, attempting to avoid the hands of the One who gives both life and death, both Yes and No, both Cross and Resurrection. And as one who has forgotten, I am suddenly confronted by a Word which declares me to be a sinner, and calls me to repentance; and once more I am given his grace to enter another day--and so on, day after day. This is the story of my life. And this is the story of the Morning Prayer Service.<sup>7</sup>

In worship form the Daily Office is a calling of this story to mind--the story of the drama of salvation.

## THE CELEBRATION OF LIFE SERVICE II

The Daily Office gave us a deeper understanding and appreciation of both traditional and contemporary worship. The majority of the leadership of the House Church had its roots in the "free church" tradition and thus felt compelled to alter the service in the direction of more free expression of thought within the new celebration. Because the group sees itself as an experimental arm of the church, it has looked at experimental liturgies and feels that some have merit and can be entwined in a meaningful way. Following the principle of the primitive church, the community used expressions of our present culture to make the "Good News" meaningful in 1970.

We affirmed the three acts of the Office, and went on from that point to develop our new celebration. The Celebration of Life II follows with explanations of each section.

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<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

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## CELEBRATION BY PRAISE

## The Greeting

L/Alleluia! Christ has risen.

C/He has Risen Indeed. Allelulia!

## The Voices of Celebration

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The Daily Office began with a short triune statement to call the worshippers to be aware of their reason for participation. More is called for at this point. We affirm with Consultation on Church Union that we begin by a formal exchange between the leader and community acknowledging each other's presence, and a reminder that God is with His people, and an adoration of God. The greeting used is an ancient salutation of Easter, based on Luke 24:34. It is a reminder that every celebration of life is a festive day, reminding us of Easter.<sup>8</sup> It begins the service with joy and excitement.

Experiencing the joy of the Risen Lord leads the worshipper into a hymn which expresses that joy. In our community, we have used "The Lord of the Dance" as the hymn that expresses the type of joy we experience.

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## CELEBRATION THROUGH CONFESSION

## The Reading From The World From Which We Come

## The Community Confessional

L/We have been given life, but we have not lived. We  
have been called to freedom, but we have found the

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<sup>8</sup>C.O.C.U., *An Order of Worship* (Cincinnati: Forward Movement Press, 1968), pp. 45-46.

burden heavy, the anxiety painful, and have returned to our illusions about life, and our deceits about ourselves. Let us therefore acknowledge our continued denial of life and our need for that Power which is beyond our reach, yet ever-present to us.

C/O Lord, we confess our slowness to see the good in our brothers and to see the evil in ourselves. We confess our blindness to the sufferings of others and our slowness to be taught by our own suffering. We confess our failure to apply the standards of conduct we demand of others. We confess our complacency toward wrongs that do not touch us and our over-sensitiveness to those that do. We confess our hardness of heart toward our brother's faults and our readiness to make allowances for our own. We confess our unwillingness to believe that Thou hast called us to a small work, and our brothers to a great one.

L/We have known life to be good, but we have renounced our hope and murmured against our fate, abusing the world about us and all therein.

C/Knowing that life is given to us only in the present, we desperately cling to our false images about the past and our imagined fantasies concerning the future. Knowing that we are received in being, we have not chosen to be. Knowing that we are mission, we have not elected to be called.

C/The Kyrie (Lord Have Mercy) (tune: Nobody Knows)

#### The Absolution

L/We are accepted by that which is greater than we.

C/Which means that whatever we have done or will do, nothing can change the fact that we are received in this world, and that even now we can dare to be who we are.

L/We are valued as we are. Life is good as it is given. The future is open. And this is the one objective and everlasting truth--in Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven--may we receive this gift and live.

#### The Response

C/Intercessory Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

\* \* \*

To help us become aware of our finite lives, we open the confessional with a reading from the daily newspaper, which lifts up man's indifference and sinfulness. It is a reminder to us that we are a part of the world; we are not escaping it, but we are recognizing our parts

within it. This leads us to the confessional.

Our understanding of confession and absolution is the same as that of the liturgical church; as we confess, we find absolution. Our particular confessional comes from the Church of the Savior.<sup>9</sup>

Between the confession and absolution, we join in singing the Kyrie (Lord, Have Mercy) to the tune of "Nobody Knows."<sup>10</sup>

Within this act we move from death to life, from prisoners to free men, from sorrow to joy. We respond with intercessory prayers and close with the Lord's Prayer.

\* \* \*

#### CELEBRATION BY HEARING THE WORD

The Ancient Word

The Contemporary Word

The Shared Word (Proclamation)

The Affirmed Word

\* \* \*

We next move to the words which make the "Word" alive today. We begin with the familiar biblical message, lifting it up for our thought and help today. In addition to the ancient biblical Word, we use a modern secular reading which brings deep insights to the scripture. The secular word lifts up the struggles of modern secular man, and relates them to the trials and the struggles of the ancients. For

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<sup>9</sup>Elizabeth O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 173-174.

<sup>10</sup>*Songs For Today* (Minneapolis: American Lutheran Church, 1964), p. 60.

example, as we dealt with the struggles in Paul (Philemon 3:4-14), we followed it with words of the struggles of Malcomb Boyd.<sup>11</sup>

Next, we have a witness from our time which lends itself to subsequent discussion concerning it. It generally takes the form of a record, painting, or drama or an occasional sermon. We deal with the witness as an art form, asking questions, reflecting, interpreting, and theologizing. We sometimes use records which ask questions such as "Who Will Answer?" or "Is That All There Is?" At other times we use records which make affirmations such as "The Impossible Dream" or "Bridge Over Troubled Water." We see the art form method as an indirect way of pointing to serious problems or illusions which people have. The art form, when handled correctly, demands a decision on the part of those involved. Their decision is to live out of a Christian understanding or out of an illusionary understanding of life. The Word is presented as it was in the primitive church through the use of contemporary culture, patterns, and form.

As the Word was meaningful in its contemporary setting two thousand years ago, it becomes meaningful in 1970 through contemporary forms. We lift up what the faith means today and make that our affirmation of faith. This is the traditional place of the creed. Our creed is not historic, but a community statement, an affirmation of our faith!

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<sup>11</sup>Malcomb Boyd, *As I Live and Breathe* (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 276.

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## CELEBRATING THE LORD'S SUPPER

## The Offertory

L/Beloved in Christ, the Gospels tell us that on the first day of the week, the same day on which our Lord rose from the dead, he appeared to his disciples in the place where they gathered, and was made known to them in the breaking of bread . . . Come then to the joyful feast of the Lord. Let us prepare his table with the offerings of our lives and labors . . . Let us bring our gifts.

C/"Create In Me A Clean Heart" (Sung while the offering is presented) (tune: "In-a My Heart")

L/Praise God for his gifts.

## The Words of Institution

L/Luke, the Evangelist, wrote of our risen Lord, that when he was at the table with them, he took bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him . . . Come, for all is ready.

## The Breaking of the Bread

L/The Bread which we break, is it not a sharing in the Body of Christ?

C/Because there is one Bread, we who are many are one body, for we partake of the one Bread.

L/The Wine which we drink, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?

C/The Cup which we bless is the communion in the blood of Christ.

## The Communion

L/Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.

C/Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.

L/The gifts of God for the people of God.

## The Common Sharing (each will share and say to his neighbor:)

For the Bread: "The Body of Christ, the Bread of Love."

For the Cup: "The Blood of Christ, the Cup of Acceptance."

## The Doxology (tune: Jamaica Farewell)

\* \* \*

The concluding act in the Celebration of Life II service is that of the Lord's Supper. It is through that act that we are once again reminded that we bring our lives and give them into the hands of God, then receiving them back as a gift to live on behalf of mankind, to create a new world.

We felt that the greatest weakness in the Daily Office is that the Offertory does not include the Eucharist. The central activity of worship in the primitive church was the Eucharist. Today it is central in the life of our House Church.

We begin the act with the offertory. The offertory statement is taken from the Consultation on Church Union service. The offering taken is a token offering, symbolizing the bringing of our whole lives to God. With the bringing of the symbolic gift, the community sings the offertory, "Create in Me a Clean Heart."<sup>12</sup> Along with the token offering, the elements are presented. We bring our offering as our symbol of trust in God and the future he has given us.

For the Words of Institution,<sup>13</sup> the Breaking of Bread,<sup>14</sup> and the Communion,<sup>15</sup> we lift out of scripture those passages which call to the attention of all the worshippers the great gift that God provides for those who join in the meal. We use the bread and drink which we used during our common meal for the elements. This is a service of praise

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<sup>12</sup>*Songs For Today*, p. 68.

<sup>13</sup>"Order for the Public Worship of God Service for the Lord's Day in Contemporary Language" in *Word and Action* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), p. 107.

<sup>14</sup>*C.O.C.U.*, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

and joy for God's great gift of our lives that he presents back to us for the sake of all mankind. As each person has presented a gift symbolic of his life, the Lord's Supper is a symbolic way of saying that God presents man with the greatest gift, his life to live.

We make this reality known as in the sharing each person takes a piece of the bread and breaks it, and gives it to the person next to him with a word on behalf of God. Likewise the wine is poured and a word is passed on. Within the Celebration of Life II, the person can use the words printed in the bulletin or say a word that seems to say most meaningfully what would make "the Word" alive and helpful to his neighbor.

Out of the joy of receiving the great gift of life, the Lord's Supper is closed with the singing of the Doxology. We use the tune of the "Jamaica Farewell" for the Doxology; singing it with much joy and enthusiasm.

\* \* \*

#### CELEBRATING THE SCATTERING

The Peace

L/Grace is yours and peace

C/From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

L/Amen

C/Amen

The Passing of the Peace (each person will say to his neighbor "The peace of God is yours this day" and the neighbor will reply: "and with thy spirit!")



### The Challenge

L/You have received the gift of life from God.

What are you doing here now? The Gospel reminds us that to be the church is to be ministering in the world . . . GO!

C/We accept the gift of life and the responsibility to participate creatively in the orders of life . . .  
 ALLELUIA!

\* \* \*

The Celebrating of the Scattering is not the close of the service of Communion, but the continuous response to God, from celebrating as a community to the serving of mankind in the world. The celebration and witness in the world are both derived from God's activity in the world. This we have proclaimed and will continue to proclaim.

The Passing of the Peace comes from Paul (Ephesians 1:2) and is said corporately and then passed individually to each other. This is the closing word of love and peace to each concerning life. The challenge to go into the world is that constant reminder to the community of faith of its mission in the world. We are sent, scattering ourselves to witness and to minister to the needs of mankind.

The community accepts the responsibility and joins together in a festive "Alleluia!" This is an exciting point, expressing a feeling of joy, hope, and expectation. It is a moment of victory; the present is exciting and the future is full of possibility. "Alleluia!" lifts this up for us as we go into the world to minister to and serve mankind.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE HOUSE CHURCH IN SOCIAL WITNESS

The House Church of Los Angeles has used, as its basic educational tool, the Ecumenical Institute. It is not directly related to the Institute, but shares its conception of care and responsibility for the world. The House Church sees its task as a creator of the world, and takes such a stance in the world. This is a revolutionary stance, revolutionary in the sense that Walter Starcke understands a revolutionary to be; "anyone who is dedicated to faith in the future of man; anyone who is willing to change and grow."<sup>1</sup>

This challenge is summed up in one of the early statements by the Ecumenical Institute concerning the task of the cadre. We see the house church as an even more inclusive designer of history than the cadre, but we feel that the statement from an Ecumenical Institute manifesto lifts up much of our understanding of mission.

The Cadre is marked by its readiness to lay down its life for the brother, to freely love the neighbor, to seek out the lost, to walk anywhere and to talk to anyone, to call into question the present structures, to celebrate the advent of the Word in the midst of every hell, to freely live, to freely die.

. . . The Revolutionary Cadre draws up the battle plan, issues the marching orders and provides the leadership, and then sets out ahead to scout the ground, clear the way, receive the blows, shed the blood, in order that the great

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Starcke, *The Ultimate Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 13.

army, the Church, might take and secure the earth, to the end that all men may know the new life that is being born in our time.<sup>2</sup>

One of the unique gifts of the house church in witness is its freedom to act. With this freedom there is an awesome responsibility to create structures of care and love.

One of the congregations which I served formed an active cadre. We explored many areas and saw numerous needs to be met. After a lengthy study, we found that a profound community need was economic. At the time of our study a new industry was moving into town which would hire several hundred women. There were no child care facilities for the lower income families. These families needed two wage earners in order to improve their standard of living. Thus it was decided by our cadre that a day care center was the best possible way to help those who were having economic problems.

The answer seemed simple. The congregation had a new educational building; the Office of Economic Opportunity was ready to give assistance; and the State Department of Welfare was also ready to help. What problems could there possibly be?

The primary concern of the cadre was in gaining the permission of the church Board of Directors and the local congregation to use the education building as a day care center. After a great deal of fact-finding, budget planning, and debate, the board approved the use of the building for the project even though several resisted out of fear of

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<sup>2</sup>William A. Holmes, *Tomorrow's Church--A Cosmopolitan Community* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), pp. 66-67.

harm to the building by the increased use. That congregation took a big step forward under the leadership of the cadre!

Many of us in that group would rather have been free to act without spending so much time "converting Christians" to the needs of mankind! But when a group is free, it has no excuse for being uninvolved because someone might object to its action. With the freedom goes the responsibility. Where, then, does one start in a house church in social witness?

### BUILDING THE COMMUNITY

The first responsibility of the house church is in building the "Body of Christ," or establishing itself as a community. This establishment does not occur immediately, but is a lengthy process. Clyde Reid suggests that:

When small groups are given a measure of freedom, they tend to move through a series of stages in relation to the authority of the leader. We may say that groups tend to move

- a) from *dependence* upon the stated leader,
- b) through a brief period of *resistance to the freedom* offered them,
- c) then through a period of '*adolescent rebellion*,'
- d) until their rebellion wins a significant victory, when they observe a period of *celebration and independence*,
- e) upon which they act more responsibly in a state of *interdependence* with the original leader-authority,
- f) although a crisis may cause the group to fall back to *dependence* and begin the cycle all over.<sup>3</sup>

Experience suggests that the house church passes through a variety of stages, progressing through surface love, surface irritations, deepening

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<sup>3</sup> Clyde Reid, *Groups Alive--Church Alive* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 62.

concern, deepening turmoil, and deepening love!

Fundamental in building community is the personal presence to each person. Every person is important and vital, regardless of who he is. At times large differences between members appear, but this, instead of causing alienation, enables the members to use differences as an opportunity to grow in the Christian faith. As Elizabeth O'Connor puts it:

We are learning that we do not have to change people. We simply have to be present to others as the people they are. And for ourselves, we do not need people to change us either. We simply need those who will be present to us as the people we are. This is how gifts are called forth. . . . The Holy Spirit is in a community of meeting, and in this community we find out who Jesus Christ is.<sup>4</sup>

At times some of us attempt to evaluate the reasons that people of differing backgrounds, concerns, or needs continue as members of our house church. We always return to the fact that here individuals feel a personal worth and an individual importance. Where men can feel their dignity, their worth as individuals, here the church is alive. As an invalid in our group said of our house church, "I had heard of it and figured it was like other churches, a bunch of - - - -! But when I met one time with the group, it all changed. I have never felt so good!" Here is a man, out of the church for twenty years, who has felt alienated and separated! Even though his concerns are different from many in the group, we convey to him the "Good News" of the love and acceptance of God. We must first convey the "Good News" to each of our

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<sup>4</sup>Elizabeth O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 171-172.

own people before we can effectively move into the world. This is a part of what it means to build the community. Dietrich Bonhoeffer spells it out this way:

The basis upon which Christians can speak to one another is that each knows the other as a sinner, who, with all his human dignity, is lonely and lost if he is not given help. This is not to make him contemptible nor to disparage him in any way. On the contrary, it is to accord him the one real dignity that man has, namely, that, though he is a sinner, he can share in God's grace and glory and be God's child. This recognition gives to our brotherly speech the freedom and candor that it needs. We speak to one another on the basis of the help we both need. We admonish one another to go the way that Christ bids us to go.<sup>5</sup>

Next the consensus concerns must be dealt with. There are so many revolutions into which a group can tie that it must be decided by the membership in which direction the real concern of the group lies. For example, a house church could consist of a large percentage of people in medical services. Perhaps, in a congregation so constructed, the revolution would center upon the problem of "playing god," or on the challenge of providing medical care for those unable to obtain it. Or again, a house church could possibly be composed of several lawyers. Here the problem of justice might be dealt with, or the challenge of giving legal advice to those unable to afford it might be a prime consideration.

Our particular house church includes a large enough percentage of youth from the Hollywood area to ensure that we deal with youth concerns constantly. To build community, we are forced to meet the

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<sup>5</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), pp. 105-106.

needs of youth in an urban area.

As we deal with our group needs, and as the youth bring their concerns before the group, we have a micro-society of the problems. As the youth experience the joy of working through personal problems or "hang-ups," they desire to lead other young people to this "cool group," the House Church.

#### PREPARATION FOR MISSION

The House Church member finds himself with a new seriousness or intentionality concerning life and his witness to the world. When one man had left his old institutional church in Washington, D.C., to join the Church of the Savior, he was asked why he had joined this new type of congregation. He responded by saying: "When I went to other churches they gave me something to do. When I went to the Church of the Savior they asked me for my life."<sup>6</sup>

This type of response of the "postmodern" or "postliberal" man is one in which he questions all society in seeking to bring about the Christian dream. It is much like the early church and the ministry of Jesus. He made the response he felt was necessary, even though it was not always socially acceptable, as he did in turning the tables upside down in the temple (Matthew 21:12-13). The new, or Christian, mind set has always been difficult for society to understand. It is hard for those outside of the house church to understand our radical approach to

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<sup>6</sup>Orlando L. Tibbetts, *The Reconciling Community* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), p. 62.

society. A radical theologian has put it this way:

The revolt of postmodern man represents a change from quantity to quality, for it has ushered in a new mentality that does not transgress moral codes but demands a new morality.<sup>7</sup>

To have this type of intentionality in bringing about a new world, serious planning, in-depth study, and careful planning of strategy is necessary. When our world and local situations are in such a state of crisis, crisis theology arises to meet the need, that is, a theology which takes the world situation with the type of radical seriousness in which the church once again can be said to be "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

In the house church, serious study is sometimes difficult. Since the group is so eager to use its new found freedom, it does not always take the time or make the effort to study in order to get its mission on solid ground. This was noted in the section on perversions of social action. This remains a constant temptation.

We have used three forms of education to acquire the background and training we need to fulfill our mission. First, we use the forty-four hour weekend Ecumenical Institute courses. For full participation in the community, the initial Ecumenical Institute course, RS-I (The Theological Revolution) is required. The course gives our house church members a common language and consciousness concerning crisis theology and its impact upon our lives and the world. Members are encouraged to

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<sup>7</sup> John Charles Cooper, *The New Mentality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 27.



do advanced weekend study in the Institute courses.

Our second educational tool is a part of our weekly gathering. Between the common meal and the Celebration of Life, we use various forms of educational methodology. They include meal conversation or discussion of a topic, and helping people with a particular decision. Meal conversations, an educational tool which comes to us from the Ecumenical Institute, consists of a series of ever-deepening questions which assist participants in articulating problems and alternative solutions.

Another form which we use after the meal is discussion of a pressing concern. This might be anything from our mission to a national legislative concern (e.g., appointment of a Supreme Court justice). In these discussions we push for group consciousness and decision.

When we are working in a particular area (e.g., developing a worship service), we often include a lecture dealing with that topic. Our future plans include inviting leaders of socially active groups to interpret what they see as today's most pressing social needs. We have discussed, for example, asking an agent of the Black Panthers, or a member of an anti-smog organization, to meet with us. We are now in a period which we see as an experimentation with methodologies which will help each member to make a decision concerning his life and the life of the community, and to take a Christian stance toward the world. We have discovered that methods differ in their effectiveness for the individual.

Our third and major method of education and planning is done by means of the all day workshop seminar. We can achieve more in a concentrated twelve-hour planning session once a month than we can in two-hour educational periods once a week. Our workshops include lectures, reading--study seminars, brainstorming, sensitivity sessions, planning, and meal periods, which we also utilize for teaching.

Within our house church we have two pedagogues, trained in Ecumenical Institute methodology, who plan, organize, and lead the workshops. The schedule is carefully worked out, each section having a strategic place in the day of learning and planning. Thus far we have had several workshops dealing with various aspects of church renewal. The most recent dealt with our new worship service, the Celebration of Life II.

In our attempt to tie worship and the social witness together, we are now planning a workshop dealing with our social witness to youth. The following is a typical schedule:

#### SATURDAY WORKSHOP ON YOUTH WITNESS

- 9:30 Lecture I - Pedagogue 1 - Introduction to the Problem
- 10:30 Workshop I - Pedagogue 2 - (Groups) Brainstorming
- 11:45 Break - Informal Discussion
- 12:00 Meal I - Pedagogue 2 - Introduction: Youth Protest Song  
Conversation: Youth Record Discussion
- 1:00 Sensitivity to the Problem - Youth Leader - Game
- 2:30 Reflection on the Game
- 3:00 Break - Informal Discussion
- 3:20 Lecture II - Pedagogue 1 - Introduction to Solutions
- 4:00 Reading Seminar - Pedagogue 2 - (Groups)
- 5:15 Workshop II - Constructive Planning (Groups)
- 6:15 Break - Informal Discussion
- 6:30 Meal II - Pedagogue 1 - Introduction: Youth Song  
Conversation: Youth Priesting

7:30 Workshop III - Pedagogue 2 - (Groups)  
8:30 Plenary - Pedagogue 1  
9:00 Celebration of Life II  
9:30 Scattering

As is quickly observed, this is a tightly structured day. Our house church, because of the closeness of its members, is freed to work in a flowing, creative manner.

We start the day with Lecture I, pointing out the importance of the area in which we are dealing. Walter Starcke points out that the youth revolt is the most complex revolt which we face today, since it reaches virtually into all aspects of revolution. It is the very symbol of revolution.

The workshop follows the introduction, which dealt with problems of youth today. The lecture is divided into sociological, psychological, and spiritual concerns. The purpose of the lecture is not to tie the problem up in a neat package, but to open the group to creative thinking.

The number two teacher introduces the first workshop, discussing workshop methodology. The membership then divides into groups of four. The purpose of the first workshop is to induce the members to define the problems with which they will be dealing.

The noon meal is introduced by the second pedagogue and a song of youth questioning or protesting is sung (e.g., "Blowing in the Wind). The conversation at the close of the meal features a current record dealing with world problems as seen by youth (e.g. "Keep the Customers Satisfied" by Simon and Garfunkel). At the conclusion of the meal, the teacher reminds the group that these are the problems we have on our

hands and that we must continue to wrestle with them.

After the meal conversation, there is a tendency toward drowsiness. At this point we use a sensitivity experiment or group activity to keep ourselves alert and awake to what is going on around us. For this particular day, we are planning a game called "Kids and Fogies," a game that one of our youth is developing. The idea follows the style of a game in the magazine *Psychology Today*,<sup>8</sup> called "Black and White." The purpose of the game is to keep the problems of the frustrations of being young before the group. The game is closed with a time of reflection upon how the members felt while playing it.

Another way of coming at this would be through role playing, letting the youth be parents and the parents, youth. Again, reflection is vital to the accomplishment of the task.

We then move into the second lecture and workshop period. The first pedagogue lifts up the fact that some church experimenters are struggling creatively with a pioneer ministry.

The teacher then builds his lecture around one form of youth ministry, the coffee house. It is important to help the house church to see that this is only one form, but one that has worked and needs consideration and evaluation.

The reading seminar follows. Once again the church is divided into groups for reading concerning different types of coffee houses.

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<sup>8</sup>"Black and White," *Psychology Today*, III:10 (March, 1970), pp. 39-53.

We are using readings from three books: *Call to Commitment*,<sup>9</sup> *Journey Inward*, *Journey Outward*,<sup>10</sup> and *The Coffee House Ministry*.<sup>11</sup> The members then discuss within their groups what they have read and have found relevant for our house church.

At the close of the reading seminar is a workshop in which we pick out those aspects of the various coffee house ministries that could be used by the House Church of Los Angeles. In Hollywood, many phases of these ministries would be irrelevant, but the group will propose those aspects that could be meaningful and workable in their own locality.

The evening meal is introduced by the first teacher. A creative song of youth culture is used (e.g. "Times They Are Achangin" by Bob Dylan). All the meals in our house church are arranged by one of our high school girls who works out a simple menu of casseroles, bread, salads, and dessert. Each person contributes to the meal.

The meal conversation deals with personal or individual ministry or "priesting" a friend. Here we role-play a friend with a spirit problem with a member role-playing his attempts to help. We then discuss the help given and reflect upon it. Again, we conclude by admitting that we are always faced with difficult situations with which we must continue to deal.

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<sup>9</sup>Elizabeth O'Connor, *Call to Commitment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 114.

<sup>10</sup>O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*.

<sup>11</sup>John D. Perry, Jr., *The Coffee House Ministry* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966).

After the conversation, we once again break into groups, brainstorming for half of the period, and developing a specific ministry to Hollywood youth during the last half. This would include specific time, place, funding, and staffing. At this point a time line sketch would be built.

The workshop closes with a plenary session, pulling together the work that all the groups have done to meet, in a concrete way, the needs of youth which we set out to consider in the morning. The ideas and materials are then compiled so that the leadership and task forces may further develop them for the next workshop. Due to the depth and complexity of this concern, many more workshops will be held before the final project is inaugurated.

The day closes with the Celebration of Life II service, the proclamation being the song, "A New Day Coming" by Mama Cass Elliott, a song of hope for a community that has used a full day of its life to plan the future in behalf of all mankind. The day closes with Alleluia!

This type of intentional, serious work and planning is of extreme benefit to the individual and to the group as a whole. As we consider our mission we discover that as we work for others, we receive a great lift in our own spirit journey in life. Our intention has not been to receive this lift, but to meet the need before us; the need of those to whom society does not minister.

Our next step in witness is to do that which we do the most effectively. In this project, we are beginning by having a series of

Sunday evening education periods on the subject, "Being Present to Others." The two teachers are planning to teach the basics of client-centered or non-directive counseling. Each person must first learn to be a help rather than a hindrance. Elizabeth O'Connor points out that "presence, service, and dialogue" are the three basics for their Potter's House.<sup>12</sup> In these sessions we plan, lecture, role-play, and analyze verbatim accounts of interviews in trying to assist each person in understanding the dynamic of being a present, helpful listener.

#### SOCIAL WITNESS MINISTRY

Out of our creative thinking and planning our long-range dream has become the creation of a youth center. When we use this term, we do not mean a ping-pong room, a record player, and a pop machine. We intend more than a coffee house or a place to "rap" about life. Our plans are for a center to help new youth in our area and youth in difficulties involving drugs, sex, parents, or jobs. One of the most important parts of the center is an *information center*, which will give out information as to where help can be found. In fantasizing about our center we see ourselves as saviors of the world, doing everything for everyone with every problem. But many of the troubled areas are already being ministered to by existing government, church, and humanitarian groups.

Our information center would tie into these existing groups,

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<sup>12</sup>O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*, p. 64.

working with them and referring youth to them. As a church, we are thankful for them. Walter Starcke points out:

But finally the church has succeeded in breeding man's basic human responsibility to his fellow man into our national conscience, into our government. Now the government with its enormous resources is doing the job. When the church leads the way in finding new and better systems, it is alive. Perhaps sometimes it has had to be emptied out in order to be filled up with fresh air. That's revolution.<sup>13</sup>

We would also use agencies provided by the state, and tie into existing humanitarian groups. In Hollywood, there is a counseling and medical service for unwed mothers. Rather than setting up a new structure for handling the problem, we would work with them. We would not create a medical structure, but would send youth with medical problems to the Hollywood Free Clinic.

Our information center would develop resources for areas presently not touched. For example, when a "runaway" comes to town, the center would help the youth find a place to stay. We would line up people who would keep youth for short adjusting periods of time or provide the young person with a "crash pad." Ways would be found to help youth with food, either at the center or at existing agencies. The information center would also concern itself with employment. Hollywood youth is in desperate need of both short-term and permanent jobs.

For the younger children of the area, a list of activities such as camps and outings could be kept. We also envision, as a part of the

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<sup>13</sup>Starcke, *op. cit.*, p. 15.



center, or alternatively, an information center for those in need of tutoring.

Another area of information might be that of legislative concerns. Here youth could receive information necessary to organizing themselves around causes, such as abolition of the draft, or the voting mandate for eighteen year olds.

In addition to an information center, we see our center as a counseling center. Within our house church, we have professionals in law, religion, family life education, and medicine. We are certain that these professionals could organize free counseling in these areas for youth. In the field of law, a lawyer could give one day of legal advice a week, a cleric could give time to counseling youth concerning internal problems, family life educators could give advice to both young parents and their children.<sup>14</sup>

Closely related to the problems of young parents is a child care center on a twenty-four hour basis. This could allow young couples to have adequate care for children when they go out, or allow single mothers an opportunity to do certain chores. This is an area which could be developed in many ways, e.g., tutoring for grade school children.

The center might also act as a gallery and outlet for young artists and craftsmen in the area for displaying and selling their

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<sup>14</sup>For additional information see: Paul and Elizabeth Van Ness, "An Experimental Church-Related Counseling Center for the Inner City," *Pastoral Psychology*, XX:198 (November, 1969), 15-20.

paintings, sculpture, jewelry and other works. The book, *Action on the Streets: A Handbook for Inner City Youth Work*,<sup>15</sup> gives other guides that a group should study before launching an all out program for youth in the inner-city.

The youth center concept is only one way in which a house church could bring together its "worldly worship" and its "worldly witness," giving once again, wholeness, health, and vitality to the church. Each house church should look at itself and its environment in order to determine its individual way of social witness.

The house church has the freedom to decide how to take its worship into witness. This ability to put the two together is the life-giving quality that the house church offers anyone who takes seriously being the church today.

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<sup>15</sup>Frank J. Carney, Hans W. Mattick, and John D. Callaway, *Action on the Streets* (New York: Association Press, 1969).

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

The church is at its greatest crossroads of history. Due to our present historic situation, the church must not float. It must become a decisive community of celebration and witness if its prime enemies, apathy and non-involvement, are to be defeated. These are radical times! They demand a radical shift in direction for the church if it is to overcome its weaknesses and sickness. Once again it must become whole, functioning in both celebration and witness.

The House Church is the best way to create the "Body of Christ" in the 1970's and is essential for the livelihood of the church. The House Church begins in concern for the world, and as it celebrates and witnesses for the world, it finds its life. As Jesus put it, "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39).

As long as the main concern of the church is to maintain the present institutions for its own sake, it is bound for eternal destruction. Those, however, who are ready to let the perverted and useless forms die on behalf of mankind, and to live in the midst of the world, to serve mankind, will find the life and vitality that the primitive church once had. This was a vitality characterized by love shared in its own community which overflowed into the world in free and responsible action. Indeed, the House Church is the living body of the church today.

The House Church is arising! It is possible, once again, to  
celebrate life. Christ is Risen, Indeed.

Alleluia!

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